

This morning we are continuing in Acts, looking at Acts 13 & 14. Pay particular attention to the difference between how Paul preaches the good news to the Jewish audience in ch. 13 and how he shares it with the polytheistic Greek audience in ch. 14:

*Acts 13:1 – 14:28 - In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. <sup>2</sup> While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." <sup>3</sup> So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. <sup>4</sup> The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. <sup>5</sup> When they arrived at Salamis, **they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues.** John was with them as their helper. <sup>6</sup> They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, <sup>7</sup> who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. <sup>8</sup> But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. <sup>9</sup> Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, <sup>10</sup> "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? <sup>11</sup> Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun." Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. <sup>12</sup> When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.*

<sup>13</sup> *From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. <sup>15</sup> After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak." <sup>16</sup> Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: "Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me! <sup>17</sup> **The God of the people of Israel chose our fathers;** he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt, with mighty power he led them out of that country, <sup>18</sup> he endured their conduct for about forty years in the desert, <sup>19</sup> he overthrew seven nations in Canaan and gave their land to his people as their inheritance. <sup>20</sup> All this took about 450 years. "After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet. <sup>21</sup> Then the*

people asked for a king, and he gave them Saul son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled forty years. <sup>22</sup> After removing Saul, he made David their king. He 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.' <sup>23</sup> 'From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised. <sup>24</sup> Before the coming of Jesus, John preached **repentance and baptism** to all the people of Israel. <sup>25</sup> As John was completing his work, he said: 'Who do you think I am? I am not that one. No, but he is coming after me, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.' <sup>26</sup> 'Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of **salvation** has been sent. <sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. <sup>29</sup> When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. <sup>30</sup> But God raised him from the dead, <sup>31</sup> 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. <sup>32</sup> 'We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers <sup>33</sup> 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.' <sup>34</sup> The fact that God raised him from the dead, never to decay, is stated in these words: "'I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.' <sup>35</sup> So it is stated elsewhere: "'You will not let your Holy One see decay.' <sup>36</sup> 'For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed. <sup>37</sup> But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay. <sup>38</sup> 'Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the **forgiveness of sins** is proclaimed to you. <sup>39</sup> Through him everyone who believes is **justified** from everything you could not be justified from by the **law of Moses**. <sup>40</sup> Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you: <sup>41</sup> "'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.'" <sup>42</sup> As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. <sup>43</sup> 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. <sup>44</sup> On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. <sup>45</sup> When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying. <sup>46</sup> 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. <sup>47</sup> 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.'" <sup>48</sup> When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. <sup>49</sup> The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. <sup>50</sup> But the Jews 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. <sup>51</sup> So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. <sup>52</sup> And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. <sup>NIV</sup> **Acts 14:1** At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. <sup>2</sup> But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. <sup>3</sup> So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders. <sup>4</sup> The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. <sup>5</sup> There was a plot afoot among the Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them. <sup>6</sup> But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, <sup>7</sup> where they continued to preach the good news. <sup>8</sup> In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. <sup>9</sup> He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed <sup>10</sup> and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk. <sup>11</sup> When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" <sup>12</sup> Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. <sup>13</sup> The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them. <sup>14</sup> But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: <sup>15</sup> "Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to **turn from these worthless things to the living God**, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. <sup>16</sup> In the past, he let all nations go their own way. <sup>17</sup> Yet he has not left himself without testimony: **He has shown kindness** by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy." <sup>18</sup> Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them. <sup>19</sup> Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. <sup>20</sup> But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe. <sup>21</sup> They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and

*Antioch, <sup>22</sup> strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said. <sup>23</sup> Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. <sup>24</sup> After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia, <sup>25</sup> and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. <sup>26</sup> From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. <sup>27</sup> On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. <sup>28</sup> And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.*

There is a lot in these two chapters, but this morning I want to look at a difference that is characteristic of Paul's preaching throughout Acts. And that is that he preaches the gospel differently based upon whether he is speaking to traditional religious people or the pagan or polytheistic Gentiles. He tailors the message a specific way to religious folks, and tailors it another way to those with no religion or with many gods. Even though we live 2000 years later, the principle remains. We would be wise to do the same in our day and age.

First, in ch. 13, he preaches in a Jewish synagogue. What is his audience? They are traditional people. They believe and try to follow the law of Moses. They believe in right and wrong. They understand guilt. They know the context of Jesus's life, even if they don't believe.

What does he do?

- 1) He places the gospel story in the greater story of Israel

Paul tells the greater story of the Old Testament and God's dealings with Israel. He talks about their time in Egypt, the exodus, the promised land, judges, King Saul and David. He mentions the prophets. He talks about John preaching repentance and baptism, preparing the way for Jesus.

- 2) He talks about the law, sin, and the need for forgiveness that is only found through faith in Jesus

He proclaims Christ's death and resurrection and offers them forgiveness of sins. He tells them that they will not be justified by obeying the law, but will be justified through faith in Jesus.

To traditional people like this we can preach God, sin, Christ, response. We can preach about sin and guilt and the need for a Savior and for forgiveness. And we can pray for God to convict of sin.

**John 3:16-18** *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. <sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.*

But not everyone in Paul's world believed in God, accepted the Old Testament, or even believed in the law of Moses. And in the same way, today, there are plenty of people who do not believe in God, do not accept the Bible, don't feel guilty before a holy God, don't accept the concept of sin, and would respond to a gospel presentation by saying "that's right for you but not for me." So how do you preach the gospel to those who are not from a traditional background? **How do you show people they need Jesus if they don't believe in God, or heaven, or accept the concept of sin and forgiveness?**

In ch. 14, Paul is in Lystra, and after healing a man, he preaches briefly to a Gentile crowd. This is an abbreviated pattern of what he will preach later on in Acts.

<sup>15</sup> *"Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to **turn from these worthless things to the living God**, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. <sup>16</sup> In the past, he let all nations go their own way. <sup>17</sup> Yet he has not left himself without testimony: **He has shown kindness** by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy."*

What does Paul do when preaching to the Greeks?

- 1) He uses words and concepts they are familiar with

He doesn't talk about sin and justification. He talks about God in nature and turning from their worthless things to God.

- 2) He tells them they are devoting their lives to things that will not give them what they are longing for, and that only God can give them those things

Paul tells them that their idols are worthless and empty but God is good and worthy of their devotion. It's not "you need forgiveness" but that you are living for empty and worthless things

In their culture, they would sacrifice to the god of war, or love, or commerce, etc. if they wanted the favor of the gods. But Paul is saying that those things are powerless and will not give you what you are looking for. The true God, on the other hand, gives you what you are longing for.

What about today? Nowadays, many people are not as familiar with the stories of the Bible. You may not convince them with the traditional gospel message of sin and forgiveness. So how will you convince them? Paul starts where they are. And we should too. Everybody is living for something. But just as in Paul's time, those things will not satisfy you. It doesn't matter if you're living for love. Money. Family. Freedom. It will not give you what you are looking for.

So what are people looking for? What are they longing for? Here are a few possibilities.

- 1) A perfect love that never leaves.

Look at how badly we want to believe that love is forever, even after death. What happens? Everyone dies. You lose every love. If you've found someone you truly love, it can be devastating. If you never find someone to love or who loves you, it is equally as devastating. And if you find someone and the love dies, then what?

But in the gospel, we find a perfect love that never leaves. A love that we will have forever. Someone who knows us completely and loves us enough to die for us and perfect us by His love.

***Romans 8:38-39*** - *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup> neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Listen to Brennan Manning speak of this love in his book *The Signature of Jesus*:

*"On the night of December 13, during what began as a long and lonely hour of prayer, I heard in faith Jesus Christ say, 'For love of you I left my Father's side. I came to you who ran from me, fled me,*



*who did not want to hear my name. For love of you I was covered with spit, punched, beaten, and affixed to the wood of the cross.'*

*These words are burned on my life. Whether I am in a state of grace or disgrace, elation or depression, that night of fire quietly burns on. I looked at the crucifix for a long time, figuratively saw the blood streaming from every pore of his body, and heard the cry of his wounds: 'This isn't a joke. It is not a laughing matter to me that I have loved you.' The longer I looked, the more I realized that no man has ever loved me and no one ever could love me as he did. I went out of the cave, stood on the precipice, and shouted into the darkness, 'Jesus, are you crazy? Are you out of your mind to have loved me so much?' I learned that night what a wise old man had told me years earlier: 'Only the one who has experienced it can know what the love of Jesus Christ is. Once you have experienced it, nothing else in the world will seem more beautiful or desirable.'*

## 2) To know that our lives have eternal significance

What about significance? How do you know your life matters in this world? What is the best you can do? Get your name on a building? Invent something that lasts? Even then you'll be dead and can't enjoy it. And what about the majority of us toiling at jobs that in the end, what difference did we make? But in God, we know that everything we do in the name of the Lord matters. We will have eternal significance.

*1 Corinthians 15:58 - Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*

Even a cup of water given in my name you will receive your reward.

## 3) Everything to be in its right place.

Peace. Order. No more chaos.

## 4) To be free from all that holds us back.

**John 8:31-32** *To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. <sup>32</sup> Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

5) To be rid of our faults and become perfect

**1 John 3:2** - *Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*

6) Good to triumph over evil once and for all

We long for suffering to end. Good to triumph over evil. Ultimate justice. Good luck finding that this side of heaven. But in the gospel, that is the promise.

**Revelation 21:1-5** *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. <sup>2</sup> I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup> He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." <sup>5</sup> He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."*

The longings of our heart are met in Christ. Does that make it true? No. But it makes it worth investigating. Is Jesus who he claimed to be? The gospel meets the deepest longings of the human heart in a way that nothing in this world ever can. And even when you fail Him, you find in His forgiveness and grace the perfect, eternal, transformative love your heart has been searching for.