

A Word of Encouragement (Part 1)

Acts: The Spirit Moving / Acts 13:13-25 / October 26, 2025

Introduction:

As we continue in our study of Acts this morning, we come to the first of three sermons Luke records Paul giving on his missionary journeys. Each sermon is unique in approach, content, and audience, showing how Paul relayed the truths of the gospel in various contexts and contributing to our understanding of the depths of God's character and grace. The first, here in Acts 13:16-41, is delivered in a synagogue. The second, in Acts 14:15-17, was outside of the city gates in Lystra. And the third, in Acts 17:22-31, in the midst of the Areopagus in Athens. As the longest of the three, we will look at this sermon in two parts over the next two weeks. Notice, first, the details Luke begins with in Acts 13:13-14, "Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem, but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia." Pause there. The first thing we see is Luke shifting from speaking of Barnabas and Saul to "Paul and his companions." This isn't to downplay the ministry of Barnabas but to emphasize Paul's leadership beginning to form. The second thing to note is Luke's comment of how "John left them and returned to Jerusalem." Now, at this point, we don't see any reason for John-Mark's departure. Some have supposed it was due to a disagreement with Paul, perhaps over going directly to the Gentiles. Others suggest it may have been due to Paul becoming the leader over his cousin Barnabas. While others believe John-Mark simply lost courage on mission, was homesick, or did not want to go further than Cyprus. While we don't know the reason, we will discover Paul viewed John-Mark's exit as a serious matter in chapter 15, while Barnabas did not, leading to them to eventually part ways. Finally, Luke sets the location of this sermon in Antioch in Pisidia, which was in the Roman province of Galatia. This sermon is likely what began the church whom Paul will later write the letter of Galatians to. With these details understood, I want to consider the introduction to the sermon in verses 14-15, and the first part of it in verses 16-23 this morning. Start in verses 14-15, where we see,

An Invitation to Speak a Word of Encouragement

This introduction provides the reason for Paul's sermon and its purpose. Look at verses 14-15, "And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, 'Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it.'" Once again, Paul is shown going directly to the synagogue. However, this time, it seems it was merely to participate in the service. The central components of a synagogue service are described in verse 15. A typical service would open with prayers, proceed to a reading from the Law, then a reading from one of the Prophets, followed by a sermon on the readings delivered by a competent teacher, and conclude with a blessing. Luke indicates that Paul and his companions were asked to give an encouragement or exhortation as the sermon. Ben Witherington comments, the Greek phrase for "word of encouragement," "is important in understanding how Luke is characterizing this address—it is a piece of deliberative rhetoric meant to urge a change not just in belief but also in behavior" (Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, pp. 406-407). This request helps us understand that Paul's words were invited and intended to call for understanding and response. We will cover what he urges them to understand today, and how he urges them to respond next week. Consider what he urges them to understand in verses 16-23, where we see,

The Revelation of God's Chosen Messiah

The first part of this sermon unpacks the significance of Israel's history before recounting the ministry and message of John the Baptist. Look at verses 16-20, "So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said: 'Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen. The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. And for about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness. And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance. All this took about 450 years.'" Pause there.

Note first how Paul identifies two groups of people, “Men of Israel and you who fear God.” This tells us both Jews and Gentile proselytes or near-proselytes were in the audience and Paul is understanding his message pertains to both. Following this, Paul summarizes five important acts of God in Israel’s history. He begins with God’s choice of the patriarchs, His care of Israel in Egypt, and His power in leading them out of Egypt. Then, he moves to God’s patience with the people’s stubbornness in the wilderness and His work in giving them the promised land. All of which he says took about 450 years, this being the time from Israel’s arrival in Egypt to their arrival in the promised land. Notice how Paul’s focus is on the formative events in the establishment of the people of Israel. However, unlike Stephen’s speech, there is no mention of Moses. God is the primary character. Look at how Paul continues in verses 21-23, “And after that he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, ‘I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.’ Of this man’s offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised.” Paul’s summation of the time of the judges, and mention of Samuel serves to transition into his comments on God’s provision of a king. A provision 1 Samuel 8:5 shows, came from a rejection of God’s plan and Samuel’s authority, to demand Samuel “appoint for [them] a king to judge [them] like all the nations.” Paul, then, reminds them of how God gave Saul as king, removed him, and raised up David as a king who would do His will. When sharing God’s testimony of David, Paul blends three Old Testament passages together: Psalm 89:20, 1 Samuel 13:14, and Isaiah 44:28. There may also be a reference to 1 Samuel 16:1 with “son of Jesse” that might allude as well to Isaiah 11:1, prophesying of the coming Messiah as “a shoot from the stump of Jesse.” Each passage has prophetic undertones that point to God’s promised forever king who would reign over His people. Paul, then, makes the point of these blended passages clear in verse 23 by pronouncing Jesus as the promised offspring of David and Savior of Israel. Jesus is God’s chosen Messiah. Now, in verse 26, Paul will transition to his appeal for them to hear God’s message of salvation. Yet, look at how he concludes before that transition in verses 24-25, “Before his coming, John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John was finishing his course, he said, ‘What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but behold, after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.’” Why does he speak of John’s ministry and confession about Jesus before that appeal? I see several reasons for this. First, by reminding them of John’s baptism of repentance, Paul makes it clear that the people of Israel are far from God and in need of repentance to find reconciliation with Him. Second, by describing how John finished his course by pointing to another, Paul makes it clear that more is required beyond responding to John. Third, by reminding them John said he was not the Messiah and pointed to one coming after him, Paul confirms John the Baptist was the voice in the wilderness crying out before God comes in salvation. And fourth, by ending with John’s comments of being unworthy to even untie the sandals of Jesus’ feet, Paul begins to highlight the majesty of Jesus. All of this firmly establishes the Christian message as part of God’s redemptive plan for Israel and confirms Jesus is God’s chosen Messiah, a point driven home in the rest of this sermon. This also prepares hearts for his call to respond to the message of salvation in three ways. It anchors hearts to the necessity of full repentance, prepares them to hear how true and lasting forgiveness is only found in Jesus alone, and points to how belief involves trusting both in who Jesus is and what He accomplished on the cross. This is what we will unpack next week in verses 26-43. For the remainder of our time today, I want to draw out two encouragements I see from this part of the sermon. First, we should,

1) See God’s Purposeful Activity in Redemptive History

Did you notice how God is the subject of almost all of the verbs in this part of Paul’s sermon? Look at verses 17-23 again. In verse 17, God “chose” the patriarchs, “made the people great” in Egypt, and “led them out of it.” In verse 19, God “gave” the land to Israel after destroying seven nations. In verse 20, God “gave them judges.”

In verse 21, “God gave them Saul,” and in verse 22, God “raised up David to be their king,” after “He had removed” Saul. Finally, in verse 23, God “brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised.” At every moment, Paul places the emphasis on God’s initiative. God was the one accomplishing everything to bring about his plan. Some try to suggest that if there is a god, that god simply set the world in motion and just stands back to see what will happen. Family, that could not be farther from the truth. God’s purposeful activity is all over history. He has been and will continue to work all things according to the counsel of His will. He has raised up kings, and He has removed kings. He has guided His people with His mighty hand. And He will continue to do so. God’s activity is no more clearly seen than in His actions to redeem you and me. He sent His son at the right time to redeem us. He called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light. He shines the light of the knowledge of His glory in Jesus into our hearts. He made us alive in Christ when we were spiritually dead in our trespasses and sin. This is called the doctrine of God’s sovereignty. And Him being sovereign over all things should be one of the anchoring truths of our faith and the sweetest words to our ears. See God’s purposeful activity in Paul’s recounting of redemptive history and let it bolster your trust in God’s sovereignty. Second, we should,

2) Be Captivated by the Glory and Majesty of Jesus

Consider with me what Paul tells us John the Baptist proclaimed. Look at the end of verse 25 again, “behold, after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.” One common task of a slave was to stoop down and untie the shoes of their master as they came into the house. Jesus said in Matthew 11:11, “among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.” Yet, John says Jesus is so majestic that he is not even worthy of being able to perform a slave’s task. This is what it looks like to be captivated by the glory and majesty of Jesus. Church, Jesus Christ is God the Son. He is second person in the triune God, true God of true God, with the Father from the beginning. He is the one through whom all things were made and by whom all things are sustained. He is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. The one whom the apostle John describes as having, “eyes...like a flame of fire,...feet...like burnished bronze, refined in the furnace, and” a “voice...like the roar of many waters.” He is the one whom angelic beings are told to worship in Hebrews 1, whom all people will call Lord in Philippians 2, and whom every living creature bows down before in Revelation 5. He is the Almighty God and the Lion of Judah. Are you captivated by His majesty? Then consider how this Jesus is also the lamb who was slain. This Jesus took on our humanity. This Jesus didn’t have a place to lay his head. This Jesus was mocked and beaten. This Jesus hung on a tree for you and me. This Jesus took our curse. This Jesus bore our blame. This Jesus received the wrath of God we deserved. Are you captivated by His majesty? There’s more. Consider how this Jesus is alive. This is the one who offers forgiveness in His name. This is the one who intercedes for you. He is the one who says come to Him and you will find rest. He is the one whose grace is sufficient for you. He is the one who promises to never leave you nor forsake you. He is the one who loves you and says no one will separate you from His love. And He is the one who is not done saving people. This Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. And this Jesus tells you to go and make disciples, knowing that He will be with you to the end of the age. Family, are you captivated by His majesty?

Conclusion:

As the worship team is coming to lead us in a time of reflection and response, ask the Lord to help you respond properly to the revelation of Jesus as His Messiah. Ask Him to help you believe that He is active in your life and our world. Ask Him to help you desire to be captivated by the glory of His Son, Jesus. Ask Him to give you a bold confidence in Christ’s authority and presence as you share His glory with others. Ask Him to go before you and stand beside you as you take the gospel to the world. Ask His Spirit to move and trust in Him to honor that request. As always, you are welcome to come and kneel before Him in a posture of humility as you make those requests of Him. We also have a team of people ready to pray with you and for you if that is what you need who will be worshipping on the front rows with lanyards on. Let’s bow down and worship Him now together. Would you pray with me?