

Urban Evangelism and Preaching in Pisidian Antioch

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Hi, my name is Elise. I live in North Oakland and I'm part of the Little Faith Group with a few of the women here.

Today's reading is from the Book of Acts, chapter 13, verses 13 to 48. From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.

From Perga, they went on to Pisidian, Antioch. On the Sabbath, they entered the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the law and the prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them, saying, Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak.

Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said, Fellow Israelites and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me. The God of the people of Israel chose our ancestors.

[1 : 22] He made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt. With mighty power, he led them out of that country. For about 40 years, he endured their conduct in the wilderness.

And he overthrew seven nations in Canaan, giving their land to his people as their inheritance. All this took about 450 years. After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel, the prophet.

Then the people asked for a king, and he gave them Saul, son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled 40 years.

After removing Saul, he made David their king. God 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. From this man's descendants, God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised. Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel.

[2 : 27] As John was completing his work, he said, Who do you suppose I am? I am not the one you are looking for, but there is one coming after me whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.

Fellow children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. The people of Jerusalem and the rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath.

Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb.

But God raised him from the dead, 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.

We tell you the good news, what God promised our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus, the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.

[3 : 42] Through him, everyone who believes is set free from every sin. As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further on these things. On the next Sabbath, 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.

On the next Sabbath, almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord, and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Good morning, Christ Church. It is good to see your smiling faces.

It's been way too long. I like your eyes, but I really like your smiles as well. So it's really good to see you all this morning. And wasn't last Sunday amazing?

And I'm not just talking about Andrew's ordination service. I'm talking about the nacho bar after the ordination service. Wasn't that amazing? There was an army of people with crockpots, melted cheese and meat, and it was just a beautiful thing.

[4 : 57] And it's created quite a buzz, I think, at Christ Church. People are asking about starting a new nacho ministry, making First Sunday's Nacho Sunday, and sort of rebuilding Christ Church one nacho at a time.

So I'm sorry to say there are no nachos today, but we will have a coffee hour in the side yard. We hope you'll come. We hope you'll meet maybe one person you don't know today.

But we are continuing today in the Acts of the Apostles, this great book in the New Testament that could also be called the Acts of Jesus by the Holy Spirit in and through his church.

And we've been tracing the movement of the gospel from Jerusalem and Israel to Antioch and Syria. And we've seen as the gospel's been moving, it's gone out to the Samaritans, and then it went to this Ethiopian eunuch, and he was converted, and he took the gospel to the ends of the earth, to the continent of Africa.

We saw the conversion of Cornelius and his household and how he took the gospel into the Greco-Roman world. And now here we are in Acts chapter 13, and it's the Apostle Paul's first missionary journey.

[6 : 13] And we're told in verse 13 that from Paphos, Paul and his companions, they sailed. And they sailed to Perga and Pamphylia, and then from Perga, they went to Pisidian Antioch.

Now, this is about 45 AD, 15 years after the resurrection of Jesus. And Paul has gone sailing overseas from Syria to the island of Cyprus, and now he's in central Turkey.

If you can imagine the map in your mind. And he's in central Turkey, which is basically his home territory, about 200 miles west of Tarsus, where he grew up.

And it's a place right where these two regions, called Asia and Galatia, come together. And we're told in verse 14 that on the Sabbath, he entered the synagogue and sat down.

This is the practice of Jesus, we're told in the Gospel of Luke, that on the Sabbath, Jesus went to the synagogue as was his custom. Week by week by week, the people of God have always gathered together to worship God.

[7 : 16] And that was their predictable pattern. So one of the elders of the synagogue presumably met with Paul ahead of time, asked him to come and be a guest preacher. And so we read in verse 15, after the reading from the law and the prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them saying, brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak.

Two major divisions in Israel's Bible, those were read, and then came this word of exhortation, which is what preaching and teaching is. It's the opening up and the expounding of this inspired text, faithfully and sensitively, so that the voice of God can be heard, and so that the people of God can obey his voice.

And that's what Paul does. He steps up to the microphone, and we're told in verse 16 that standing up, he motioned, he apparently used his hands a lot too, he motioned with his hands and said, people of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me.

And what comes is this amazing, marvelous summary of the Apostle Paul's incredible message here in this little sermon, and what he says to those people I want to say to you today, and that is that God's king rules us with forgiving grace.

That's Paul's message, that God's king rules us with forgiving grace. And I want to talk a little bit about how God's king rules, because that's where Paul starts out.

[8 : 52] In verse 17, the God of the people of Israel chose our ancestors, and right away we hear that the Apostle's teaching is biblical teaching, because he goes to Genesis chapter 12, God's covenant with Abraham, because Paul thinks like a Jew, he writes like a Jew, he argues like a Jew, and he knows Israel's scriptures extremely well, backwards and forwards, he's masterfully skilled at unfolding the story of the Bible from Moses to the prophets.

He quotes all kind of books of scriptures from Genesis to Habakkuk in this sermon, and he works his way from the covenant with Abraham to the covenant with Moses to the covenant with David, working through the history these people knew, the hopes that they cherished, but Paul gives them a golden key that unlocks its meaning.

And he starts out again, verse 17, the God of the people of Israel chose our ancestors. That's Genesis 15, chapter 12, verse to chapter 50, where God elects Israel from among the nations.

And then he says that God made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt with mighty power. He led them out of that country. That's Exodus 1 to 15, where God delivers Israel from slavery.

And then he says in verse 18, for about 40 years, he endured their conduct in the wilderness. That's Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, where God cares for his people despite the fact that they're a pain in the you-know-what.

[10 : 24] And then in verse 19, it says he overthrew seven nations in Canaan, giving their land to his people as their inheritance. That's the book of Joshua, where God provides Israel with a home in the promised land.

And then in verses 20 to 22, Paul expounds the book of Judges and Ruth and Samuel. And he basically says, look, the Bible is this immense, sprawling, capacious, millennia-long story.

You can easily get lost, but if there's one key word that sums up the whole theme, it's this. It's kingdom. The kingdom. And we're told in verse 21 that the people ask God for a king.

And then in verse 22, that God made David their king. God's people are meant to be ruled by God's king. And we're told in verse 22 that that king is to be a man after God's own heart.

A person who will do everything that God wants him to do. This king is to rule Israel and through Israel to rule the nations with justice and truth.

[11 : 32] And that's the problem with the entire Bible, right? Because David, King David and David's sons failed miserably, failed fantastically, failed tragically to be the kings that they were supposed to be.

And everything ends up in exile with the people of God longing for the true king to come. And this is where Paul gives these people the golden key that unlocks the problem of the entire Bible.

In verse 20, he says, from this man's descendants, God brought to Israel the Savior Jesus as he promised. Jesus is the Savior King.

He's the Messianic King that God had promised would rule universally and reign eternally. And Paul goes on in verses 26 to 29 to say that the message of salvation is that through Jesus' death on the cross, he established once and for all the kingdom of God on the earth.

And Paul's argument is this. Remember how God liberated us from slavery? Remember how he conquered in the promised land? Remember how he provided a leader in King David?

[12 : 47] Well, God is still liberating us, but he's liberating us from sin. He's still conquering, but now he's conquered over death. He's still providing a leader, but believe it or not, that leader is a crucified king.

And then Paul comes to the climax of his sermon in verse 30, and he says, but God raised him from the dead, 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. We tell you the good news, what God promised our ancestors, he has fulfilled for us their children by raising up Jesus.

Paul says, we live in a sad and broken world. We live in a messy, muddled world, but God has launched his new creation in the midst of this world.

God has launched the new world order, and that new world order is ruled by one who was dead and buried, and yet he did not see corruption or decay.

[13 : 55] God's new creation is ruled by this king who's throbbing with life and energy. He is full of power, he's full of wisdom, he's full of truth and justice, and he's the one that we've all been waiting for who can put the world right, who can bring heaven down to the earth, and he says, my friends, brothers and sisters, I invite you, do not miss out on what God is doing here and now through his king, Jesus.

And what I want to say to us today is that the truth of this risen king I think is far more comforting than many of us perhaps realize. Maybe you've seen the movie *The Darkest Hour*, it came out in 2017, it's an account of Winston Churchill, arguably one of the most important public figures of the 20th century.

And Churchill is facing extreme challenges in his new role in early days as the prime minister of Great Britain. He's not only trying to manage the terrifying and expanding presence of Adolf Hitler in Europe, but he's also facing mounting pressure from his political rivals to enter into peace talks with the Nazis.

And so basically the future of Western civilization is hanging in the balance and his own relationship with the king is tepid at best. His foreign secretary says, you only have to meet with the king once a week and Churchill says, well that's like saying you only have to have your tooth pulled once a week.

And later on we find in this pivotal scene late in the film, Churchill is sitting on his bed in the dark staring into space, he's clearly at a very low ebb, just troubled and with the full weight of the world on his shoulders he's completely unclear how he's to proceed.

[15 : 57] He looks disheveled, his suit's rumpled, he's a complete mess. Maybe you relate to that. Then he has this surprise visitor come into his home. King George VI enters the room, he's the most proper man in all of Europe, the height of manners and decorum wearing this impeccable suit and the king comes and he says, Mr. Churchill, I hope you can forgive the late hour but your wife thought tonight might be a good time, should we sit?

It appears the prospect of a peace deal with Hitler has increased dramatically and Churchill says, well later today I will address the house, I should like to know your mind because nations which go down fighting rise again but those which surrender tamely are finished.

the king says, well what about the mood of the parliament? Churchill says, it's fear and panic. The king says, well are you not afraid? Are you afraid at all?

And Churchill says, I am most terribly afraid. Our defeat in France is the most crushing in the history of the empire. Support among my party for a campaign of resistance has collapsed.

and at this point the king moves to sit next to his prime minister and the king says to him, you have my support. And Churchill can't believe he's there as he says, your majesty.

[17 : 20] And the king says, you have my support. We shall work together, you shall have my support at any hour. And Churchill says, well I fear I may be defeated.

On certain matters I have few people with whom I can speak frankly. And the king says, well perhaps now we have each other. And they remain sitting there side by side friends for the rest of their lives.

Today you might be navigating the labyrinth of adolescence. You might be navigating the difficult dysfunctions of your family as we have these wonderful family gatherings this summer.

You might be navigating your messy workplace or the complexities of being part of an imperfect church or the complications of your neighborhood and your city. But my friends, when you know that the king is seeking you and that the king is with you and he's for you, that your king is on your team and he's by your side, that you have the support and the friendship of your king at any hour.

You can face anything. You can face your darkest hour. In Christ church, we don't just have any old king. We have God's promised anointed king, the king of the ages, who went through death and then came out the other side, the king of the ages who filled his tomb with life, the king who walked out of his grave and launched the new creation of God and says to everyone and everything, come alive with me.

[19 : 09] Christ church, the kingdom of God is here and the king is risen and he's with you and he's for you and I wonder if that gives you any comfort in the midst of what is going on in our lives.

And I want to say also that the truth of this risen king is not only far more comforting than we realize, but the truth of this risen king is more dangerous than I think most of us realize.

One pastor is sort of commenting on this and he said, you know, everywhere the apostle Paul went a riot broke out but everywhere I show up they just serve tea. And the reason, you know, Paul's scandalous message about God's king who's risen started riots is because he went to these places where Caesar was believed to be lord and Paul said, no, you know, Jesus, the king, the risen king, he's the lord of all.

And therefore, we need to recover this dangerous message that Jesus, the king of this world, calls all people to believing allegiance in him, calls all of us to live under his kingship in obedience to him, calls all of us to share this amazing message of his kingship to the whole creation.

This is the point of Paul's sermon, that God's king rules. And God's king not only rules, but he rules us.

[20 : 43] And he rules us with forgiving grace. God's king rules us with forgiving grace. Paul comes to the climax of his sermon, and like all good preaching, he issues an invitation and a challenge.

He says in verse 39, therefore, in light of this risen and living king, therefore, my brothers and sisters, I want you to know that through Jesus, the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.

And through him, everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.

Whatever those words mean, they mean that our king, Jesus, he's not a coercive or oppressive or dehumanizing king.

In fact, it says in verse 43 that when the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas who talked with them and they urged them to continue in the grace of God.

[21 : 47] Our king is a gracious king. Our king is a merciful king and he rules us with grace. to make us into a forgiven and a free people.

You've got to remember that Paul is preaching this sermon in Galatia and in a few short months he's going to write this letter to the Galatians where he'll explain these simple yet profound and deep words like sin, forgiveness, grace, faith and belief, justification and freedom.

I don't have time to do all that today but I do want to give you a story with some pictures in your mind. Without God's grace and the grace of God's king, we are like the ever given.

Did you follow the story of the ship, the ever given? This was back in March, about six days in March. This giant container ship got stuck in the Suez Canal in Egypt.

The ship is a quarter mile long. It's the size of the Empire State building about four football fields. This Leviathan weighs over 200,000 tons.

[22 : 59] So if a ship this large gets stuck, it's like really, really stuck. And this became one of the most consequential shipping accidents in maritime history. The Suez Canal is a 150-year-old trench that goes through Egypt and it's this critical shortcut between east and west.

It's one of the world's most important waterways that connects Europe and Asia and through there about 15% of the global container shipping capacity moves.

And part of the problem that day was that the weather, there was this wind storm, this sand storm that turned the ship sideways and caused it to start moving to the left and to the right down this waterway.

And then human error got involved and the crew tried to regain control of the ship by putting on speed, which of course only made matters worse. And so the ship, this giant ship just slammed into the bank and ran aground.

The bow and the rudder were stuck in the sand and the mud and the rock. And when the Apostle Paul talks about this word sin, he's talking about the human condition of being stuck, of being run aground.

[24 : 15] He's talking about how we're fixed and we're lodged as people, whether we like it or not, in our own self-centeredness and self-interest. And our sin, therefore, creates a chain reaction that ripples and compounds basically in every direction.

The ever-given clogged one of the most crucial arteries of trade in the whole world. It blocked shipping traffic in both directions.

There were 400 ships that had to wait in line outside the canal. This colossal traffic jam significantly disrupted the global supply chain and created basically a full-blown crisis.

This stalled ship, this one stalled ship was holding up \$10 billion worth of cargo a day. Things like cars, oil, livestock, laptops, jet fuel, scrap metal, grains, sweaters, sneakers, electronics, appliances, toys, medical equipment, toilet paper.

Any brand you can imagine, it was on one of these ships. And so if you're having trouble finding what you need at IKEA, it's probably, this is the reason. Three months later, in fact, the crew and the ship of the ever-given, with all of its 18,000 containers, \$750 million worth of goods is still stuck in Egypt.

[25 : 40] And isn't that a picture of our lives? We get wedged in sin. And because we're wedged in ourselves, turned in on ourselves, everything else in our relationships gets clogged and stalled and jammed and blocked.

And all of our loves become disordered. All of our loves become jacked up, right? We don't love God with all of our heart. We don't love one another as we love ourselves.

And so the great question of the human dilemma is how do we get dislodged? How do we come to be salvaged? How did it happen for the ever-given?

Well, they brought in eight of the world's most respected experts, and they deployed diggers and front-end loaders and specialized dredgers and tugboats, and they were working on this thing for six days and six nights, and none of their efforts were enough to fix the problem.

Anybody feel like that? I got \$10 billion problems a day, and nothing I do is making it any better. In fact, it might even be making it worse. Well, by God's grace, on the seventh day, the tides turned.

[26 : 51] This ship that was stuck just north of the Red Sea, where Israel got unstuck from her bondage and went into freedom, after six days, the ever-given had a little mini exodus of her own.

Because of this fortuitous full moon, when it was closest to the earth, and because the sun and the moon and the earth were aligned in such a way, it conjured up this unusually high spring tide where the waters began to rise.

And as a result, the ship got unstuck from its bondage, and it began to float, and it was free to move again. And when that happened, there were horns, and there were sirens, and there were cheers, and all the world that was watching this drama rejoiced.

Because these puny machines and human effort were not enough to get this mammoth boat out of the mud and the muck. The ever-given needed heavenly bodies to move, heavenly bodies to align.

The ever-given needed a cosmic event that could salvage her and set her free. And this, my friends, is what the Apostle Paul means when he talks about the forgiveness of sins.

[28 : 09] Listen to it again. He says, therefore, my brothers and sisters, I want you to know that through Jesus, the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through him, everyone who believes is set free from every sin.

Paul says that that heavenly body, that heavenly person who came close to us, who aligned himself with us to salvage the human race, is God's King Jesus, whose very name means that he will save people from their sins.

And this is what he talked about all the time. The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. I've come to call sinners to repentance. I've come to seek and to save those who are lost and stuck in their sin.

And Paul says the cosmic event that dislodged us and that salvaged our lives stuck in sin is the King's cross. Because forgiveness is a moral impossibility for God without the King's cross.

How can the moral ruler of the universe forgive sinners without compromising his absolute justice? And yet how can he judge sinners without frustrating his love?

[29 : 27] It's because of the cross of God's King that the tides turn for us. The death of God's promised anointed King caused the waters of God's grace to rise up and to set us free.

Paul says in verse 28, though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have Jesus executed. Jesus didn't die for his own sins because he had none.

They could find no evidence against him. And so if Jesus didn't die for his own sins, and if the resurrection proves that God vindicated him as the righteous one, then who did he die for?

He died for you. He died for me. When he was hanging on his cross, the dark clouds of sin encircled around him and closed in on him, and he cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And as he bore our sins on the cross, you know what he was praying? Father, forgive them. Father, forgive. And then he spoke that most powerful word spoken in the history of the world when he said to tell us die.

[30 : 44] It is finished. The work of dislodging and salvaging, the work of forgiving and freeing has been and will remain forever accomplished.

The king's cross shows us that God's righteous, implacable intolerance of our self-centeredness, and yet at the same time, it shows us the burning, inextinguishable compassion that he has for sinners like me.

At the king's cross, God judged our sin, and yet there he bore his own justice himself. In the king's cross, he condemned sin in the flesh of Jesus, and there he suffered the condemnation for sin.

You see, it's here at the king's cross that infinite justice is exacted for the penalty of sin, and yet infinite grace accepted it as sufficient for every one of us.

And so, my friends, it is finished. The work of sin-bearing has been completed, and therefore nothing needs stand in the way, and nothing needs stand in God's record against any one of us anymore.

[32 : 04] You can be justified. You can be declared in the right with God, forgiven, a full and free member of God's people, reconciled in the fellowship and the favor, the very grace of God.

Hear it one more time. Verse 39. Through him, everyone who believes is set free from every sin.

Have you heard Jesus whisper in your ear, my son, my daughter, your sins are forgiving you. Go in peace.

In Christchurch, if you've heard that, do you still believe it? I want to urge you, like Paul and Barnabas urged the people there in Pisidian Antioch, I want to urge you today to continue in the grace of God.

For God's king rules us with his forgiving grace. Amen. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[33 : 20] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.