

The News about Jesus

Acts 13:13–52

On Wednesday I got back from being in Hattiesburg, Mississippi for ten days visiting my mom and my three brothers. Mom had a really bad fall, but I'm happy to report that she's recovering well. But if you had turned on the news in Hattiesburg last weekend, you would have heard the meteorologist forecasting rainstorms. Some people would have heard that weather forecast as good news because their lawns or their crops could use the rain. But others heard it as bad news because the University of Southern Mississippi was hosting an NCAA super regional baseball tournament against Tennessee. Rain would mean weather delays and lots of waiting around. That's exactly what happened.

I tell you this to illustrate that two people can hear the exact same news and respond very differently. Today's passage illustrates that this is definitely true when it comes to the news about Jesus. One group of people heard the news about Jesus and responded with great joy and with faith, while another group responded with great hostility and unbelief. Both responses are very understandable; everybody had their reasons for responding the way they did.

The same dynamic is at play in our day, even here in this room. As we talk about Jesus this morning, notice your response - whether you hear the news about Jesus as good or bad or somewhere in between. From the perspective of the Bible, what you believe about Jesus is more consequential than what you believe about anything else.

Acts 13:13-52 tells us two foundational things concerning the news about Jesus. First. . .

The news about Jesus comes with a promise and a warning. (Acts 13:16-41)

As we saw last week, Paul and Barnabas were sent out by the church at Antioch in Syria to take the message about Jesus to surrounding peoples and nations. Luke tells us that they came to the city of Antioch in Pisidia. On the Sabbath they went to the synagogue where the Jewish community gathered each week to worship. After "the reading from the Law and the Prophets" (i.e., the Hebrew bible), the ruler of the synagogue invited them bring "a word of encouragement" to those gathered. Apparently their reputation preceded them. Saul/Paul stood up and addressed the crowd which included fellow Jews as well as God-fearing Gentiles (see vv. 16 and 26).

Paul first reminded them of how God had been good to the nation of Israel in spite of their disobedience and waywardness. God had chosen them, not because they were the great in number or because they were the most noble. No, he simply chose them in order to display his goodness and ultimately in order to supply a Savior for all the nations of the earth. God multiplied them when they were in slavery in Egypt. God delivered them from bondage, put up with their disobedience in the wilderness, and gave them the Promised Land as an inheritance. When they demanded a king, he gave them Saul.

When Saul failed as a king, God gave them David, “a man after [his] own heart.” In verse 23 we read:

23 Of this man’s offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised.

Although the people of Israel were disobedient generation after generation, God still showed his goodness by giving them a Savior, Jesus, just as he promised. You would think that they would be overwhelmed with gratitude at the goodness of God. However, Paul explained, the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem didn’t recognize Jesus as their Savior. Why? Because they didn’t understand the teachings of the prophets that they had been reading every Sabbath. [That statement (verse 27) was a shot across the bow because on *that* Sabbath a few minutes earlier they had read from the Law and the *Prophets*.]

Paul explained that even though Jesus was innocent, they condemned him and executed him and put him in the tomb. **But God** raised him from the dead. And for many days he appeared to his followers who became eye-witnesses to the people. Paul announces that he and Barnabas were bringing them this news that Jesus is the “Son of God” promised in Psalm 2. Jesus is the “Holy One” whom God promised in Psalm 16 would not rot in the grave.

At this point in his message Paul makes this news about Jesus very personal for those gathered; he wanted to persuade them to believe. Honestly, I hope you also take this news about Jesus seriously and that you will seriously consider believing (if you don’t already). First he talks about the *promise* (verses 38 and 39).

38 Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you,

Paul wants his fellow Jews to know that exclusively through “this man,” Jesus, forgiveness of sins is available.

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

We’ll see the significance of “everyone” in a few minutes; everyone included both Jews AND Gentiles. And it includes everybody in the room here today and everybody joining us online. Everyone who believes “is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.” The NT books of Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews explain how the Law (the Ten Commandments and the rest of the covenant that God made with Israel in the wilderness) could not bring genuine freedom. They are good because they reveal the mind of God (how he thinks), they reveal how we should be living our lives, and they reveal how sinful we are when we fail to do so. But they cannot bring freedom.

That’s why passages such as Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36-37 God promised that he would one day make a new covenant with his people that would do what the Law could

not. Instead of commandments written on tablets of stone, in the new covenant God's word would be written on the human heart through the indwelling Holy Spirit. As Paul suggests here in Acts 13, people enter into this life-giving covenant through faith in Jesus. Those who believe are "freed" from the guilt and bondage of sin (Romans 6:7).

That's the promise: *Everyone who believes lives.*

In verses 40 and 41 Paul gives the **warning**. Remember that he had already recounted how the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem didn't recognize and receive Jesus as their Savior because they didn't understand what the prophets said about Jesus. Here he warns the people of Antioch to avoid the same response.

40 Beware, therefore, lest what is said in the Prophets should come about: 41 "Look, you scoffers, be astounded and perish; for I am doing a work in your days, a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you.' "

Verse 41 is drawn from Habakkuk 1:5. There God told the prophet Habakkuk that he was doing something astounding in his day, something that people would consider unbelievable: he was raising up the Babylonians to take the nation into exile because of their sin. False prophets and others would scoff and say that God would never do that. But he did. Those who disbelieved perished.

In the same way Paul challenges his hearers to realize that God was doing something astounding in their day: God had supplied a Savior in the man Christ Jesus. Paul warns them not to be like the false prophets and say that God would never save his people through a crucified Messiah. If they disbelieved, they would perish. Instead of eternal life, they would experience eternal punishment.

This is the message of John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that **whoever believes in him should not perish** but have eternal life." The warning is that *everyone who disbelieves perishes*. The news about Jesus came with promise and a warning: **Everyone who believes lives; everyone who disbelieves perishes.**

In the rest of this passage Luke describes two very different responses to this news about Jesus. We see the second thing, namely that. . .

The news about Jesus is good news to some and bad news to others. (Acts 13:42-52) In verses 42ff we see the immediate reaction of the people who heard Paul teaching in the synagogue.

42 As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. 43 And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.

To many of the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles heard the news about Jesus as good news; and they wanted to hear more. But others heard it as bad news. This is what happened a week later:

44 The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.

45 But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him.

Luke is referring to the Jewish leaders here. They were jealous that “the whole city” had shown up to hear what Paul was saying. They were like the people mentioned in Habakkuk 1 who didn’t believe that God was doing an astounding thing in their day. They were unwilling to lay down their pride and acknowledge that even though they knew the contents of the Bible but they didn’t know the heart of God. Ten or twelve years earlier Paul was just like them before Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus.

46 And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.

Paul wasn’t saying that he would no longer go to synagogues and bring the message about Jesus. But since they had rejected the gospel, Paul and Barnabas would now turn to take the gospel directly to the Gentiles. Paul had at least a couple reasons for making such a bold move. First, God had appointed him as “an apostle to the Gentiles” (Acts 9:15, Galatians 2:9, 1 Timothy 2:7, etc.). Second, the book of Isaiah (42:6) had made clear that the Messiah would be a “light for the Gentiles” (see also Luke 2:32):

47 For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, “ ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’ ”

Notice the contrasting responses to Paul’s announcement that the news about Jesus was meant to all the peoples of the earth. Notice how the believing Gentiles heard it as good news:

48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. 49 And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region.

By contrast, the Jewish authorities heard the news about Jesus as bad news:

50 But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.

Luke isn’t describing people who had heard the gospel and were still considering whether Jesus really might be the Savior of the world who had died for their sins. He is describing people who had decisively disbelieved and rejected the gospel and who

aggressively opposed the gospel. This happened almost everywhere Paul went. There was organized, violent opposition to the simple message about Jesus.

51 But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. 52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Here we see the contrasting response; ***The news about Jesus that was good news to those who believed was bad news to those who disbelieved.***

Let's think for a few minutes about the implications of this truth both for those of us who are followers of Christ and for those of us who aren't yet followers of Christ. First, if you are already a follower of Christ, there came a time in your life when *you become convinced in your heart that the news about Jesus is **good news**; you believed and began to experience **life***. It could be that you came to Christ very decisively when someone shared the gospel with you; some people know the exact moment and place where they first believed. Or perhaps you aren't exactly sure when you came to Christ, but you know that you believe and have life. Don't feel bad if you don't know the exact moment you first believed; what matters is that you are *presently* a believer.

My challenge is to ask yourself this question: "Does the news about Jesus still amaze me and give me joy?" Or is it "old news"? Has it become commonplace and blah, blah, blah?

When I was in college, I started listening to this new thing called "Christian music." It seemed like there were about 8 or 10 Christian artists. I had been listening to songs like "Honky Tonk Women" and "Only the Good Die Young" and "Margaritaville." So I got a few cassette tapes of artists like Keith Green and BJ Thomas and Amy Grant. I loved those tapes and played them over and over and over. I had roommate at LSU who was really into music, so I thought he should listen to some Christian music. I gave him a cassette tape and asked him a few days later what he thought about it. His comment was something to the effect of, "It was okay. But all the songs are about the same thing - Jesus dying on the cross and coming back to life." After thinking about it for a while, I realized that he was right. The thing I loved thinking about a singing about was the death and resurrection of Christ.

And that should still be true of me and of everyone who is a believer. If you ever get bored with the gospel you're in a very dangerous place spiritually. Why? Because everything we believe and everything we experience in our walks with God flow from the death, resurrection, and enthronement of Jesus. As we saw in verse 38 and 39, in Jesus are forgiveness of sin and freedom from the guilt and bondage of sin.

I would encourage you to spend some time over the next few days in prayer and meditation and conversation concerning the question, "Does the news about Jesus still amaze me and give me joy?"

Let's think about the implications of this passage for those of you who aren't yet followers of Christ. If that's you, based on today's passage, I'd encourage you to do a

couple things. First, notice **how** you are responding to the news about Jesus we've been discussing today.

Today's passage illustrates several different ways of responding. After Paul spoke in the synagogue on that first Sabbath, we read that for some people, their initial response was very **positive**; they were hungry to hear more (vv. 42-43). Maybe that's your response this morning. You're at a place in your life where you're not showing up on Sunday morning because "you're supposed to" but because you are legitimately curious about the message of Jesus. Perhaps you sense that there's a void in your life that nothing has been able to fill. If that's the case, do what they did in Acts 13; they kept learning throughout the week and came back the next Sabbath. We talk about and sing about Jesus every single week.

On the other hand, today's passage tells us that others (like the Jewish authorities) responded **negatively**. They had their reasons: jealousy, tradition, power, status, etc. They eventually became violent and aggressive. It may be that your initial response to the news about Jesus is negative (or trending that direction).

Do you notice whether your response to the news about Jesus is more positive or negative?

If it's negative, I'd also encourage you to discern **why** that's the case. It's very likely that you have your reasons. Some reasons are more legit than others. For example:

- * Maybe (like most people) you've got your church horror story; you've been hurt by church people and so you are understandably very cautious. I totally get that. This church is far from perfect, but we do hope that it's a safe place to explore your faith. We want to be people with whom you can have honest conversations about Jesus.
- * Maybe you don't like the diagnosis of "sinful." Maybe that just sounds so negative. You'd admit that you're not perfect, but "sinful"? The diagnosis throughout the Bible is that every single one of us is sinful. But we have all sinned against God in many, many ways.
- * Maybe you're afraid that following Christ will be too restrictive and boring - that following Jesus would be like being crammed into a box, that your world would get smaller and smaller. I think I used to think something like that; but my experience has been just the opposite.

Let me close with a story that puts all of this into perspective. Hopefully this story gives you a picture of the type of life you will have if you believe and become a true follower of Jesus. Tim Keller tells the story of a young woman who began attending the church he pastored in NYC. One day Keller met her after church and introduced himself. She said, "I come in and out sometimes. I'm not sure I believe what you do, but I'm intrigued." Keller asked her how she found out about Redeemer (where he was a pastor). She told him her story.

She worked for a TV network in NYC. When she had worked there for only a short period of time she made "a really bad mistake" - a career ending kind of mistake. When she thought she'd be fired, her boss (who was well respected and who had a lot of

credibility with everyone else) went in and took the blame for what had happened. He said, "I didn't train her well. . . I didn't prep her well to do her job. If you have to be mad at somebody be mad at me, but don't fire her." When he did this he lost credibility and social capital. But the woman got to keep her job.

When this woman found out what her boss had done, she went in to thank him. He kept saying, "Don't worry about it. . ." But she kept asking him why he would do what he did. She said, "I've had bosses in the past who've taken credit for **good** things I've done; but I've never had a boss take the **blame** for something bad I've done. . . I've never seen that before. . ." Finally he said, "You've forced me to say this, and I'm only going to say it once: I'm a Christian. And **my whole life is based on the man who took the blame for me**. And that tends to shape everything I do." She said, "Where do you go to church?"

That man had a gospel-shaped life. That's what we're pursuing here at Faith. That type of life is available for everyone who believes, including you.