

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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BRIDGES TO THE GOSPEL

Acts 13:13-41

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There are four points to today's message:

- Paul appealed to a sense of community.
- Paul acknowledged common beliefs and history.
- Paul connected with current events.
- Paul presented the gospel.

SCRIPTURE: Acts 13:14

From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down.

INTRODUCTION: Two things I want you to notice before we dig into this passage. First, up to this point in time, the apostle we know as Paul has been called by his Hebrew name, Saul. From this point forward, he is referred to by his Greek name, Paul. Second, this is where John Mark parts company with the two missionaries. Again, we'll discuss more about that in another sermon, but I want you to remember it.

After leaving Paphos, Paul and Barnabas travelled to Perga, which is in modern-day Turkey. Of course, this first part of the journey would have been by ship. Since ships were reserved primarily for merchandise or military ventures, they most likely travelled by cargo ship. This definitely was not a luxury cruise. The two missionaries likely covered the rest of the journey on foot. So, after days in the cargo hold of a ship, they set out hiking towards Pisidian Antioch.

PAUL APPEALED TO A SENSE OF COMMUNITY.

SCRIPTURE: Acts 13:14-15

From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. 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.”

EXPLANATION: When Paul wanted to share the gospel, he found ways to capitalize on what he had in common with his audience. Therefore, his first stop was usually the synagogue. The word synagogue is actually a Greek word that means a “place of assembly.” Synagogues were created as places of worship for Jews who did not live near enough to Jerusalem to regularly visit the temple. Just like we worship in church on Sundays, Jews gathered in synagogues on Saturday to worship.

Today, when a visitor enters our church, we can usually figure out very quickly whether the person is a visitor who is comfortable attending church services or one who is new to the church worship experience. This difference would have been even more obvious to the Jews attending Sabbath worship. The synagogue was also a social center where charitable and educational studies took place.

Paul was very familiar with the dress, the rituals, and the practices of synagogue worship. He looked the part. He knew what to wear, where to sit, when to stand, and what to say. He knew the words to the songs that were sung and the recitations that were repeated. So, Paul’s attendance and general conformity in the synagogue was basically his way of saying, “I’m one of you.”

Typically, we are more prone to listen to someone who is similar to us. Paul wanted the people of Pisidian to understand that he knew what it meant to be a Jew, that he related to who they were collectively.

APPLICATION: Clearly, God has called some to be missionaries in foreign lands. They have to learn a new language and a new culture. But God has not called everyone to do that. Don’t believe that in order for you to share the Gospel you have to go somewhere else and talk with someone you do not know. Paul teaches us a good lesson here. Share the Lord in the environment that is most familiar to you.

PAUL ACKNOWLEDGED COMMON BELIEFS AND HISTORY

SCRIPTURE: Acts 13:16-22

Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: “Fellow Israelites and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me! ¹⁷ The God of the people of Israel chose our ancestors; he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt; with mighty power he led them out of that country; ¹⁸ for about forty years he endured their conduct in the wilderness; ¹⁹ and he overthrew seven nations in Canaan, giving their land to his people as their inheritance. ²⁰ All this took about 450 years. “After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet. ²¹ Then the people asked for a king, and he gave them Saul son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled forty years. ²² 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.’

EXPLANATION: Traditionally, synagogue worship followed a schedule that mirrored temple worship. For this reason, Paul was probably familiar with the scripture that was going to be read that day before he ever entered the temple. In addition, he was also aware of the common practice to ask visitors, especially distinguished rabbis, to give an impromptu message after the traditional reading. As such, Paul may have chosen his message to coordinate with the scriptures that had already been read. While we don't know that for sure, the tradition of the day leads us to believe that Paul used a lot of common sense when he addressed the people.

Paul did not just jump into a presentation of the gospel. Instead, he began by addressing a topic that he and his audience had in common. First, he acknowledged their common worship of the one true God. In this point, he was able to relate to everyone present at the service - Jew and Gentile. We'll see in the next few scriptures that Gentiles were present which leads me to believe that the Holy Spirit was already at work. Under normal circumstances, it would have been very unusual for Gentiles to be present.

Then he took his speech one step further by recapping some Israelite history.

- He reminded them of who they worshipped.
- He reminded them of the blessings they had received.
- He reminded them of God's past faithfulness.

- He reminded them of their unique identity in God’s chosen people.

APPLICATION: Again, we learn from Paul. This is so simple and practical and even so natural that it would be easy to miss it altogether. Paul reminded them of the things they had in common which helped them identify with him. He did that before he talked about any of their differences.

So, he appealed to a sense of community and acknowledged their common beliefs and history.

HE CONNECTED WITH CURRENT EVENTS

SCRIPTURE: Acts 13:23-31

“From this man’s descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised. ²⁴ Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel. ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ “Fellow children of Abraham and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. ²⁹ When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb. ³⁰ But God raised him from the dead, ³¹ 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.

EXPLANATION: We do not know if Paul’s reputation preceded him. We also do not know whether any other Christians had already evangelized in the area. However, Pisidian was a major Roman colony. Because merchants, soldiers, politicians, and other visitors travelled there, we can be certain that the congregation heard some of the news from Jerusalem.

That’s probably why Paul doesn’t give a long introduction on who John the Baptist was but mentions him and his ministry casually. In the same way, he doesn’t give a long speech about the identity of Jesus. Instead, Paul connects the gospel to events

that they already knew about but most likely did not understand. In other words, he met them where they were.

APPLICATION: Look at the scripture again. There is no fancy language here. Here is no nuance. It's just plain language. Paul met them where they are. Might I suggest when you prepare to share the Lord in some way to others that you use plain language? Keep it simple.

Paul appealed to their sense of community and acknowledged their common beliefs and history. He also connected with current events. Then...

HE PRESENTED THE GOSPEL

SCRIPTURE: Acts 13:32-41

“We tell you the good news: What God promised our ancestors³³ 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.’³⁴ God raised him from the dead so that he will never be subject to decay. As God has said, “‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.’³⁵ So it is also stated elsewhere: “‘You will not let your holy one see decay.’³⁶ “Now when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his ancestors and his body decayed.³⁷ But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.³⁸ “Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.³⁹ Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.⁴⁰ Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you:⁴¹ “‘Look, you scoffers, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you.’”

EXPLANATION: Based on his previous personal and evangelistic experiences, Paul knew that the Jewish people would most likely be less than receptive to the message of Christ. However, that did not stop him from sharing it. Instead of marching into town with a trumpet, instead of standing on the street corner shouting it out, Paul tried to bridge the divide between him and his audience. Then, after he had done what he could to establish trust, he presented the truth.

ILLUSTRATION: My friend Tricia tells a story of when she was a little girl and took a bus ride from Tennessee to New Jersey. It was a long ride - more than 13 hours - and the bus was crowded. Tricia's mom and infant sister sat in a seat next to someone else. Tricia sat across the aisle next to a young Asian girl. After some time of sitting there quietly, one of them began to talk to the other. They talked, laughed, and pointed out the window at the various sites. When the bus stopped, everyone departed for a short break. The little girl's family, however had reached their destination. Tricia still remembers the other little girl's tears as they waved good-bye. The girls looked different. They came from different countries, had different families, and surprisingly, neither of the girls spoke the other's language, but they still managed to communicate. They enjoyed each other's company, and for a short time, they even became friends. They found common ground.

APPLICATION: Today, our country is divided on so many levels. We have political, social, religious, and racial differences, but the message of Christ is still the same. As believers, it's our job to tell the lost people around us about the hope of salvation. Instead of concentrating on what separates us, I want you to consider how we can, like the Apostle Paul and the little girl named Tricia, make friends and communicate despite the differences. I want you to think about how we can, like Paul, bridge the divide and share our faith.

After all, isn't that what Jesus did for us? Our sin separated humanity from a holy God. So, God sent his son, Jesus, to come to earth, to live as a human so that he could empathize with our weaknesses and understand our temptations. He gave his life so that he could bridge that divide that was caused by our sin. Since God did all that in order to relate to man and meet man on his level, then the least we can do is find common ground with others so we can relate to them and love them like Jesus.

In the United States, we are surrounded by people who look very similar to us, who live in the same communities we do, who have similar histories and opinions, people who experience similar current events. Yet, we still tend to concentrate on our differences, and we use that as an excuse to keep us apart.

In addition, we no longer need to cross an ocean for foreign missions. Foreign missions have literally come to our doorsteps. Our communities are more diverse than ever before. People we meet, work with, shop with, and eat with often look,

speak, and act differently than we do. They have different histories, different traditions, different beliefs, and opinions. Unfortunately, we use those differences as an excuse to keep us apart.

Can I just remind you that even the person who is most different from you in this world is still more similar than you think? Genetically speaking, scientists tell us that we are 99.9% the same. In addition,

- We all experience emotions.
- We are all imperfect.
- We all are valuable in the eyes of our Creator.
- Jesus died for us all.

What more do we need to know? As believers, we have a responsibility to tell lost people about Christ. Like Paul says in 1 Corinthians, we must become all things to all people in order that some will be saved.

Do you want to bridge the gap between you and that lost friend, that lost neighbor, that lost stranger in order to share the gospel? Like Paul, you can appeal to a sense of community, acknowledge common beliefs and history, and you can connect with current events. More importantly, you can always start with love. John 13:35 says, *“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”* Seek to love people better and help people come to the know the Lord.

If you aren't a Christian, then I want you to think about what Paul said, *“Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.”* Do not be the one who never believes.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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