

## Hear the Sermon of the Lamb!

A sermon on Acts 13:38-49

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I know this is a dangerous question to ask, but I'm going to ask it anyways. What makes a great sermon? I mean, think about some of the best sermons you've ever heard. What makes them so good? Is it the references to current, timely events? Are the good sermons the ones that have the jokes that make you laugh? Are they the ones with the catchy themes? What makes a great sermon?

You know, I think of some of things that make a great sermon, or even a great speech or a great speaker, it's someone or something that one, touches or stirs the emotions, and two, compels you to action. Like Martin Luther King, Jr., especially his "I have a dream..." speech, definitely touched emotions, led people to act. Even someone like Hitler, I don't condone his beliefs or his actions, but he was a very compelling speaker, who touched his people's emotions and led them to action as well.

A good sermon? You heard a pretty good one last Sunday, from the apostle Peter. If I had to characterize it, it was short and sweet and to the point. To Cornelius, the message was, "Jesus was anointed by his Father as the Chosen One, the one chosen to bring peace to all people through his life, death, and resurrection, and the one who has chosen you to be his own child."

Well, today, I want to tell you about the greatest sermon I ever heard. The man who preached it really needs no introduction. It was the Apostle Paul, probably the most famous apostle in the Bible...and I got to hear him preach in person.

Now, Paul was on one of his mission trips, where he was famous for planting churches all around Greece and Asia and for preaching to the Gentiles, non-Jews, like me. That's exactly what he was doing with his partner, Barnabas, at my hometown, Pisidian Antioch.

It was Sunday morning, and the setting was really no different than the setting you're sitting in here. I was there with some of the Jews from town and also with some of my own, the Gentiles. The leaders of the synagogue asked Paul if he would say a few words, and well, Paul's never one to turn down an opportunity to share Jesus, so he jumped at the chance.

And then, he spoke. I wouldn't say he was the greatest orator, someone who could captivate you, maybe like a Joel Osteen or Billy Graham, and I think he would agree, but his words, his message, let's just say no one could compare there to Paul. Paul knew how to speak to the heart, and to him, that's all that mattered.

You heard the last part of Paul's sermon a few minutes ago, but there was more to it. He walked us through the story of salvation, how God rescued his chosen people, the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt, how he safely brought them to the Promised Land. He graciously gave the people judges and then kings to lead them, faithful rulers to do his bidding.

All of that was meant to build up to the climax, the Savior, Jesus, the Lamb of God, promised since the fall into sin. He came, but not everyone accepted him for who he was. Some of the Jews hated Jesus, so much that they put him to death. But it was all part of the plan, because his death was for us, to save us

from our sins. And his death wasn't the end, because Jesus rose from the dead three days later, just as God had promised through Isaiah, who said, "You will not let your Holy One see decay."

That was such wonderful, refreshing news, hearing again the message of our salvation through Jesus. And then came the best part of Paul's sermon, "Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses." How about that? Jesus, who came from the Jews, did not only come for the Jews. He also came for the Gentiles, for everyone else.

Did you hear that? Did you hear what Paul called us, what he called me? "My brothers." I can't tell you what that word means to me, 'brothers.' I mean, do you understand the weight that one word holds? There was a time when the Jews hated us Gentiles. The Jews wanted salvation and God's love only for themselves. They thought it was only for them. The names they called us...Gentiles, heathens. They might as well have been calling us a racial slur, that's how deep that word, heathen, cut. They looked at us as not being worthy of God's love, as only being capable of being unbelievers doomed to hell.

But not Paul. To him, we were brothers. Brothers (and sisters), part of a beautiful relationship, with each other and with our Brother, Jesus. We were one and the same. Yes, sinners, but because of Jesus, through Jesus, we share forgiveness. Because of Jesus, through Jesus, we share one faith in Jesus. Because of Jesus, through Jesus, we share in justification, being declared 'not guilty' of our sins.

You know, I could count on one hand the number of people who ever told me I belonged. I, a Gentile, a heathen, a so-called "unbeliever," belonged in God's family. It was incredible to hear that from Paul. After the service, my friends and I were in line to shake Paul's hand, and we heard the people ahead gushing over his sermon, begging, pleading with Paul and Barnabas to stay the week and preach again next week. I admit, I was going to do the same.

We just couldn't get enough of them. We wanted to hear them keep talking about Jesus, so we were pretty much their groupies over the next week, following them, drinking in every morsel of encouragement and God's Word they had to pour. I'm sure your pastor would love to have that as well, people who are so eager for God's Word, eager to grow, always calling with Bible questions or for Bible passages. That's what we were like!

But I can't say everyone was as impressed with Paul and his message as we were. Because at the end of his sermon, Paul had a strong warning, "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."

Those biting words talk about what's needed for heaven. It's not your birth-line, your race, your religious affiliation. It's faith in Jesus. There were some there who basically scoffed at Paul's message, who refused to believe about the forgiveness through Jesus Paul preached, who'd rather trust in their lineage, being children of Israel instead. Basically, they were rejecting Jesus.

And for people like that, some Jews in my time, and there are people like that even around you today, who don't need Jesus, don't want Jesus, who reject Jesus, they will perish. That's the sad reality, but a reality nonetheless.

But for you, I'm guessing rejection of Jesus isn't the problem. I can stand here and look around me and be confident you are part of God's family with me, sharing that faith in Jesus, in the Lamb, and in his saving work.

But that's not the only problem here I saw. The next week, we actually had a packed church. It was wonderful. But not everyone thought so. Some of the Jews were actually frustrated and filled with jealousy and spoke out against Paul. They didn't like how Paul and Barnabas were so eager and willing to share the gospel with us Gentiles.

What, because we were different? Because we weren't "worthy"? Because Paul and Barnabas weren't giving all their attention to the Jews anymore?

I'm guessing you would deem any, all of those reasons to be rather foolish, wouldn't you? But has that ever been you in that situation? A new guest comes to church, and you give him the cold shoulder. "He's unfamiliar. He's not like the rest of us. He doesn't belong." Or, maybe you feel jealous that other members or even Pastor are spending more time with the new people who have been coming. "I used to be able to talk to him whenever I wanted. But now, he's "moved on" to the new guests."

You know what those mindsets are saying, don't you? It's the sinful attitude that "it's all about me and what I need rather than what does God want and what those people who don't know Jesus or who are new to the faith need."

Paul understood that. You see how he responded? "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." God gave the Jews the first shot. When they rejected Jesus, Paul and Barnabas were called to move on to the Gentiles, who needed Jesus and his forgiveness as well.

How short-sighted and how sinful it would be of us to think the same way, that we're the only ones God cares about and we're the only ones who need him and no one else does so we keep Jesus to ourselves and don't want to share him.

To me, it seems odd that the Jews got so worked up. I mean, sharing the gospel with the Gentiles, it wasn't a new development. Paul pointed to the book of Isaiah, where God promised this exact thing would happen, "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."

You know who Isaiah was talking about, don't you? Isn't it the same person John the Baptist talked about when he said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world"?

What a beautiful picture. Jesus, the Lamb of God. Now, I'm guessing you've seen at least pictures of a lamb before. Aren't they so precious and cute and cuddly? You would think they could do no wrong. The Lamb of God was the same. Jesus was innocent. He could do no wrong. He did no wrong. He was perfect.

But you know what we used lambs for, and what the Old Testament believers used lambs for? Sacrifices. They offered these precious, perfect lambs as sacrifices to God, to appease his wrath and to pay for their sins. That's what happened with the Lamb of God. Jesus, innocent, blameless, perfect, sacrificed himself on the cross to pay for our sins, to appease God's eternal wrath, to win us forgiveness.

And not just our forgiveness. “The sins of the world.” “Bring salvation to the ends of the earth.” It was for all people. The Lamb was slain for all people, you and me, Jew and Gentile alike.

Yes, Jesus lived, Jesus died, and Jesus rose for all people, for all the world! For you, who are a Gentile, like me, a sinner, like me, unworthy and underserving of anything from God, especially not his grace and his mercy and his love and his forgiveness, like me, “the Lamb of God...takes away your sin.”

That’s the sermon of the Lamb. You hear that Sunday after Sunday, and that’s what makes a sermon great. Doesn’t matter how modern it is or how many jokes it has. Give me Jesus! That’s what makes the great sermon.

Yes, week after week, you hear the sermon of the Lamb, but it doesn’t stop there. You don’t just hear it. No, you share the sermon of the Lamb as well. I want to share with you the double meaning in Paul’s words, “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”

Yeah, when Isaiah first spoke those words, he was talking about the Light of the World, Jesus, who has brought salvation to every one of us. But Paul said those same words are God’s command to you and me. He’s pointing at me. He’s pointing at you. God commands you to be a light to the Gentiles, to the world. You, singular, as the Greek word for “you” is singular, so you, singular, are to be a light to the world. You, singular, are to bring salvation to the ends of the earth.

You can see I did that. As the book of Acts says, I was part of making “the word of the Lord spread through the whole region.” Now it’s your turn. You act. You share the sermon of the Lamb. You share the gospel with those who don’t know Jesus. What a wonderful privilege God gives to every one of you, to be his messenger.

The sermon of the Lamb. It’s such a great message. It touches our emotions, our hearts with the forgiveness only Jesus gives. And it moves us to action. The sermon of the Lamb, the work of the Lamb, who takes away the sins of the world, moves you and I to share the Lamb with others. So let’s go do it. Amen.