

The Promise of Salvation
Series: Fully Devoted Followers
Acts 13:13-52
Sunday, May 9, 2021

When was the last time you made a promise but didn't end up fulfilling that promise? Maybe you made it in haste. In order to diffuse a tense situation or to get out of a jam, you promised a reward or agreed to a task, only to hear later, "Dad, you promised!" or "Honey, you said you would take care of this." We expect people to keep their promises. Yes, sometimes circumstances are beyond our control, and keeping our promise is difficult. But people expect that our yes will be yes, and our no will be no.

In our walk-through of the book of Acts, we're now following Paul and his companions on a first-century preaching tour around the Mediterranean Sea. This morning, we're reading about the next leg of the journey in the city of Pisidian Antioch. If the name Antioch sounds familiar, that's because the launching point for this first journey was also a city named Antioch located in Syria. Antioch in Syria and Antioch in Pisidia were two of sixteen different cities in the Roman world named after the military general Antiochus. That may sound confusing, but then again, there are 88 different cities or towns in the US named after George Washington.

There in Pisidian Antioch, Paul and his friends visited the local synagogue for Sabbath worship. Just as it's our practice every Sunday to read the Bible aloud before the sermon, in those days, every Sabbath the Law and the Prophets—what we call the Old Testament—was read aloud followed by an exposition of the text. As a guest of the synagogue, Paul was invited to give the sermon. Luke introduces this story in verse 13:

"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"" (vv. 13-15).

That day in the synagogue, Paul chose as his sermon topic God's promise of salvation. Our promises are sometimes made in haste and occasionally broken, but God always fulfills his promises. Paul's main point that day was that **God's promise of salvation is fulfilled in Jesus, Israel's Savior, and is for all who will believe.**

I want to walk us through the main points of Paul's sermon. In this message we'll see Paul emphasize the promise prepared, the promise fulfilled, and the promise proclaimed. Then I want us to look at how the people of Antioch responded to God's promise of salvation so that each one of us might consider our own response.

So let's jump in. In verse 16, Paul accepts the invitation to preach.

“Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: “Fellow Israelites and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me!” (v. 16).

It was a mixed crowd that had gathered for worship. We would expect to find Jews at the synagogue, but there were also a number of Gentiles in attendance. They may not have been Jewish converts, but these Gentiles or God-fearers worshiped the God of Israel. It was to this congregation that Paul made his first point: **God prepared the way for Israel’s promised Savior.**

Luke doesn’t record what the scripture reading was that day, but in this first part of his sermon, Paul summarizes the Old Testament story in just two paragraphs. He reminded his audience that the history of Israel was all about God preparing his people. Highlighting a period of roughly 450 years from Israel’s history, Paul wanted them to see that God was the lead actor in this story. Verses 17 through 19 remind us that it was *God* who chose his people. *He* made them prosper in Egypt and *he* rescued them from slavery. God loved them in their disobedience and blessed them with an inheritance of the promised land. Israel’s story is one of God preparing his people.

But in preparing his people, God was also preparing a throne. The history lesson continues in verse 20 moving from the period of the judges up to the time of Samuel the prophet and Saul the first king of Israel. Saul was the king Israel wanted, but he wasn’t the king Israel needed. God’s preparation for Israel’s Savior would not run through Saul’s line, it would begin with a man after God’s own heart named David.

None of Paul’s sermon up to this point would have ruffled any feathers. But what Paul said next in verse 23 likely caused anyone who knew their Old Testament to take notice. Referring to King David, Paul asserted,

“From this man’s descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised” (v. 23).

More than a statement about Jesus’s family tree, Paul was referring to a promise made to David, and ultimately given to Israel that God would one day raise up a descendant of David who would reign as God’s king forever. This forever-king would ultimately deliver God’s people. In 2 Samuel 7, we read,

“The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son” (2 Sam. 7:11b-14a).

God's promise was initially fulfilled when David's son Solomon built a *literal* house for God, a temple. But ultimately God's promise would be fulfilled through a son of David who would establish God's house—his kingdom—and would reign as king forever. And over the next thousand years, God gradually revealed the identity of this promised king and son of David. God was preparing a message. For example, through the prophet Isaiah, God promised that,

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this” (Isa. 9:6-7).

God was preparing the way for Israel's promised Savior by preparing a people, preparing a throne, and by preparing a message. Notice in verse 24 that Paul's fast-paced review of history skips ahead from David to John the Baptist. Once John arrives on the scene the message changes. No longer were prophets announcing that Israel's promised Savior was coming. With John the Baptist, the message was that Israel's promised Savior had come.

In verse 26 Paul moves from past to present, from preparation to fulfillment, and to the second point of his sermon: **God fulfilled his promise by raising up Jesus, his Son.**

Can I admit something to you? I am a huge fan of shopping or ordering ahead via a smartphone app. I place orders from Amazon, I place orders for pickup at Target, and there are tons of food options in Bemidji that can be ordered through an app. Every time I place an order, I receive two emails. The first one shows up immediately, confirming the items that I purchased. This is a message of promise. But then I will receive a second email, one that confirms that the items I ordered have either been shipped, or that they are ready for pick up. This is a message of fulfillment.

Notice how Paul shifts gears from promise to fulfillment there in verse 26:

“Fellow children of Abraham and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent” (v. 26).

Paul not only says that God has fulfilled his promise, but that the message confirming this fulfillment has now been given *to us*. The “us” in verse 26 was originally addressed to Paul's hearers, but it also applies to all of us gathered for worship this morning. This message of fulfillment has been sent to *us*. It's sitting in our inbox confirming all that has been promised to us. But *how* was God's promise fulfilled? That's what Paul addresses in verses 26-37.

First, God's promise was fulfilled in Jesus's rejection. Even though each week God's promise of a Savior was read in the synagogues, many failed to see the fulfillment in Jesus. Every Sabbath the Law and the Prophets were read, and yet the Jews of Jerusalem did not recognize their Savior. But even their rejection was itself a fulfillment of what the prophets foresaw about the coming of Jesus. Verse 27 says,

“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” (v. 27).

Second, God's promise was fulfilled in Jesus's death. In verses 28-29, Paul states,

“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” (vv. 28-29).

Consider for example the words of God's promise from Isaiah 53,

“He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.” (Isa. 53:3-5, NIV).

Third, God's promise was fulfilled in Jesus's resurrection. Paul makes the bold claim in verse 30 that “God raised [Jesus] from the dead.” He backs up this claim by asserting that over a period of many days the risen Jesus was seen by a variety of witnesses. But Paul wasn't just reporting eyewitness testimony from Jerusalem. What these witnesses had seen with their own eyes was the fulfillment of what God had promised centuries before. Paul continues in verse 32,

“We tell you the good news: What God promised our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus” (vv. 32-33a).

If you still have your Bible open, I want you to take notice of something you might not be aware of or might not use very much. In many Bibles there are lists of other verses footnoted at the bottom of the page or listed in the margin. These are called *cross references* and they're included to help you see connections between the passage you're reading and other passages in Scripture. These are not part of the original text, but scholars who assist in editing our Bibles have included these to aid our study, especially when one part of Scripture is referring to another part.

That's what Paul is doing here. He's just claimed that God raised Jesus from the dead and that he has fulfilled his promise given to us in scripture. So, Paul cross-references three Old Testament scriptures that point forward to the resurrection of Jesus. We don't have time to look at these in detail, but if you would like to look these up, they are Psalm 2:7, Isaiah 55:3, and Psalm 16:10. Each of these make an important point on their own, but taken together they support what Paul claims in verses 32-33,

“We tell you the good news: What God promised our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus” (vv. 32-33a).

These verses support Paul's claim that Jesus, the ultimate son of David, the Holy One, the bringer of promised blessing, did not remain in the grave, but was raised up to life.

As important as King David was to God's story, notice in verse 36 that when David's life was over and his part in the story was complete, David died and was buried, and like every other body in the cemetery he suffered decay. But not Jesus. When Jesus cried out from the cross, “It is finished,” he died, he was taken down from the cross and was buried. But his body did not stay in the tomb to suffer decay. God raised him from the dead. And in raising up Jesus from the dead, God was also attesting that he had raised Jesus up in another sense. God raised up the promised son of David to be king and gave Jesus his rightful throne.

There's a common thread in this part of Paul's sermon. God's promise fulfilled in Jesus was fulfilled according to the Scriptures. Years later, Paul would write to the church in Corinth and say something very similar.

“Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:1-4, NIV).

What was Paul saying to the congregation in Pisidian Antioch? Every sabbath they came together and read scripture. The sermon was different each week, but God's message was always the same, and it always pointed to Jesus. But their Jerusalem brothers and sisters missed it. They heard the scriptures read, but they rejected the notion that they had anything to do with Jesus. In a moment we'll see the consequences of that rejection. But first, what about you?

None of us has perfect church attendance. Even pastors miss a Sunday once in a while. But think about how many times you've heard the Bible read over the last year. How

many sermons do you think you've listened to over the last twelve months? Now, multiply that out over the number of years you've been in church. In almost 16 years of pastoral ministry I've preached somewhere around 500 sermons, and my guess is that over the years I've listened to at least that many. Your mileage may vary, but week after week when you come to church or you watch online, you're reading scripture, you're hearing it preached, and you're even singing the words of scripture in song. Let me ask you this, do you understand what you're hearing? Do you understand that this book is all about God's promise fulfilled in Jesus, his Son?

After showing how God prepared the way for Israel's promised Savior, and after claiming that God had fulfilled his promise by raising up Jesus, Paul wrapped up his message by announcing that **God's promise of salvation has been proclaimed to you.** Look at verse 38:

“Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses. Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you: “ ‘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’ ”” (vv. 38-41).

The gospel is a message that must be proclaimed. First of all, it's a proclamation that through Jesus there is the promise of forgiveness. Writing to the Colossians, Paul proclaimed,

“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross” (Col. 2:13-14, NIV).

Second, through Jesus there is the promise of freedom. Notice in verse 39 that our hope to be made right with God cannot rest on our ability to obey God's law. We can't remove our guilt by our own acts of righteousness. Rather, we are justified—declared righteous—when we trust in what Christ has done on our behalf.

Third, through Jesus there is the promise of eternal life. Unfortunately, not all who hear the promise will respond in faith. After he finished his sermon, Paul and his companions were invited back the following Sabbath. When they met one week later, the whole city of Antioch had gathered to hear more about their message of grace.

This visit to Antioch would mark a turning point in salvation history. Though God had been preparing the way for Israel's Savior, and though Paul clearly demonstrated the fulfillment of God's promise in the risen Jesus, many Jews in Pisidian Antioch, like

those in Jerusalem, rejected the gospel and refused to accept Paul's message. The response from the Jews was so negative that they orchestrated a plan to stir up persecution and drive Paul and his friends out of town.

But the Gentiles had a much different response. We read in verses 48-49 that,

“When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. The word of the Lord spread through the whole region” (vv. 48-49).

One sermon, two very different responses.

This sermon is now added to the list of the great number of sermons you've probably heard over your lifetime. Next week there will be another sermon, and then another, and then another as long as you keep coming to church. It doesn't matter how many sermons you will listen to over the course of your lifetime. What matters is how you will respond to the fact that **God's promise of salvation is fulfilled in Jesus, Israel's Savior, and is for all who will believe.**