

2023 Theme - Focus On What Matters

Sermon Series - The Book of Acts/God's Plan for His Church

Sermon Title - A God Thing!

Sermon Text - Acts 13:14-52

Sermon Presenter - Pastor Larry

Acts 13:13-52

Acts 13:13 From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.

Acts 13:14 From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down.

Acts 13:15 After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak."

Acts 13:16 Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: "Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me!

Acts 13:17 The God of the people of Israel chose our fathers; he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt, with mighty power he led them out of that country,

Acts 13:18 he endured their conduct for about forty years in the desert,

Acts 13:19 he overthrew seven nations in Canaan and gave their land to his people as their inheritance.

Acts 13:20 All this took about 450 years. "After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet.

Acts 13:21 Then the people asked for a king, and he gave them Saul son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled forty years.

Acts 13:22 After removing Saul, he made David their king. He 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.'

Acts 13:23 "From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised.

Acts 13:24 Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel.

Acts 13:25 As John was completing his work, he said: 'Who do you think I am? I am not that one. No, but he is coming after me, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.'

Acts 13:26 "Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent.

Acts 13:27 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.

Acts 13:28 Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed.

Acts 13:29 When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb.

Acts 13:30 But God raised him from the dead,

Acts 13:31 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.

Acts 13:32 "We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers

Acts 13:33 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.'

Acts 13:34 The fact that God raised him from the dead, never to decay, is stated in these words: "'I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.'

Acts 13:35 So it is stated elsewhere: "'You will not let your Holy One see decay.'

Acts 13:36 "For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed.

Acts 13:37 But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.

Acts 13:38 "Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.

Acts 13:39 Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.

Let's pray!

There's some powerful truths found in those 40 verses! If you would like to follow along with me with the notes of today's message, you can do so on the Youversion Bible App. Just open your app and then go to more, and then to events. Click on Northshore Church and you'll have the full sermon notes. Here's a little background to the Scripture we just heard! Paul is invited to speak in the synagogue. He reminds the people of God's work with them throughout history. He connects the dots, so to speak, between the Old Testament and the New Testament, between the law and Christ, between the Jews and the Gentiles, between judgment and mercy! Today as we examine Paul's message about the circumstances of Israel's history and the events surrounding the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we'll discover...

It's A God Thing!

The first God thing is that...

God initiated the relationship!

Acts 13:16 Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: "Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me!

Acts 13:17 The God of the people of Israel chose our fathers...

Then

Paul is reminding the people that God was the one who initiated the relationship with the Jewish people. He reached out to them, called them, chose them, but as we will see later in the message, they always had a choice to either embrace their calling or to reject it. Here's what God's Word says about their calling from the Lord in the book of Deuteronomy...

Deu 7:6 For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

Deu 7:7 The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.

Deu 7:8 But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Deu 7:9 Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands.

In verse 7 we find a very important concept or truth about God choosing them...

Deu 7:7 The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.

What the writer is reminding the Jewish people of is this: The LORD did not choose them because of their greatness or their numbers or their power or their goodness! He chose them because He loved them and had made a promise to their forefathers! We see numerous examples in the Old Testament of how the people of Israel would sometimes think otherwise. But God continually pointed out to them that it was not their righteousness that earned them God's blessing. Look at Deuteronomy 9:5-6...

Deuteronomy 9:5 It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the LORD your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Deuteronomy 9:6 Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people.

God wasn't happy about their attitudes or behaviors, but He was a God of love and He kept His promises so He still took care of them! Of course we all know that God at times had to discipline His children, but He loved them nonetheless!

And what about us Now

God still initiates the relationship! Jesus said this...

John 6:44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day.

God draws us, He reaches out to us by way of His Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit convicts us of our need for a Savior, of our need for His righteousness, His forgiveness, His mercy, His guidance, and of our need for His protection and peace! Paul put it this way in Ephesians...

Eph 1:17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

Eph 1:18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,

Eph 1:19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe...

Did you hear that last verse?

Eph 1:19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe...

Paul goes on to say...

Ephesians 1:19 ...That power is the same as the mighty strength

Ephesians 1:20 he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,

Ephesians 1:21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

And then we read these powerful words from Paul about this subject in 2 Thessalonians...

2 Th 2:13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

God always makes the first move when it comes to a personal relationship with a person, but as we will see in a moment, your response is your responsibility! The second God thing is that...

2. God endured their behavior!

Our text tells us that...

Acts 13:18 he endured their conduct for about forty years in the desert,

Then

Neh 9:16 "But they, our forefathers, became arrogant and stiff-necked, and did not obey your commands.

Neh 9:17 They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles you performed among them. They became stiff-necked and in their rebellion appointed a leader in order to return to their slavery. But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. Therefore you did not desert them,

Neh 9:18 even when they cast for themselves an image of a calf and said, 'This is your god, who brought you up out of Egypt,' or when they committed awful blasphemies.

God at times had to punish the people of Israel for their wicked behavior. They didn't get a free pass to live in wickedness, but God never completely destroyed them and always saved a remnant because of His great love for them and because He had chosen them for the purpose of taking His love to the world! There's a lot of complex and sad things going on in the Middle East and especially in Israel. We need to pray for all of the people caught up in the conflict, Jews, Palistenians, and Christians! God's Word instructs us to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. An Iranian Christian, Sohrab Ahmari, wrote this about Israel...

"The persistence, against all odds, of the body of Israel—as both a community and a physical reality of flesh and blood—must have a meaning..."

And he is talking about a meaning for us as Christians. He went on to say...

"This body of Israel gave birth to Christianity's universal mission."

In other words, our Savior, our Messiah, Jesus was Jewish and came to save not only Jews, who had gone astray from their calling and mission from God, but He came to save Gentiles as well! And that's us, so I will ask you...

And what about us now?

Can we really point a finger at Israel's disobedience to follow their calling and their mission to take God's love to the world? Can we be so self-righteous? Have we as Christians been completely faithful to our calling and mission to take God's love to the world? Absolutely not! God's Word makes it plain...

Isa 53:6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way...

We like to blame everything on Adam and Eve, but I'm not so sure I would have been any different! A Christian Rock singer I knew in Nashville when I was a pastor there, named John Cox, wrote a song that says it well...

"Take a long look into my past, you will find me just as bad as The worst ones
Closer look and you might find, I was born with an evil mind Like the first ones"

God's Word couldn't be any plainer when it says...

Rom 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...

So God has also endured our behavior! Aren't you glad God is patient? When I think about my life and behavior before Jesus changed my life, I'm absolutely blown away that God put up with all that long enough for me to be saved! I'm reminded of this passage in 2nd Peter...

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

And here's the amazing message of the Gospel, the good news, the God story that we celebrate today...

Rom 5:6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

Rom 5:7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die.

Rom 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The third God thing in our text is that...

3. God provided for their needs!

Acts 13:17 ... he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt, with mighty power he led them out of that country...

Then

It's so fascinating how God provided for the Children of Israel in Egypt and continued to provide for them even after their great rebellion in the desert.

Neh 9:20 You gave your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and you gave them water for their thirst.

Neh 9:21 For forty years you sustained them in the desert; they lacked nothing, their clothes did not wear out nor did their feet become swollen.

But even though God provided for them, they still refused to obey Him. Isn't it strange how we humans can be sometimes? It seems when God is providing and blessing in powerful ways that those can be the times people become dissatisfied and want even more, or they become comfortable and decide they don't really need God and they go their own way and do their own thing! But God, in His mercy, continued to take care of His children.

And what about us now?

Jesus has told us plainly...

Mat 6:31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

Mat 6:32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

Paul said this...

Phil 4:19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.
Phil 4:20 To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

But I've got to admit something: Even with these wonderful promises from God and despite the absolutely amazing way God has provided for my family and me down through the years, I can sometimes worry and fret about every little thing that comes up and especially about the big things! And everytime God comes through I think back at all of the unnecessary and needless worry, fear and pain I've put myself through by not trusting in my very faithful Savior and Good Shepherd, Jesus! Several times this past week I've had to remind myself of this verse...

Philippians 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Philippians 4:7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

And what does the very next verse say? Does it say to think about all the negative, the difficult, the unknown struggles that may be in our future? Absolutely not! It says...

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

When you are worrying and fretting about everything, you're not obeying this verse. You are focusing on the negative! Don't do that!!

The fourth God thing we discover in our text is that...

4. God gave them their desires!

Acts 13:21 Then the people asked for a king, and he gave them Saul son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled forty years.

You might think this was a good thing, but let's look a little deeper at the circumstances back...

Then

God had given Israel, judges, and a prophet, Samuel, but they were not satisfied. God wanted to be their king, but they wanted an earthly king. God gave them their wish. The problem: earthly kings sometimes make terrible mistakes. I don't have time to showcase all of the negative things that happened because the people insisted on having their own way but listen to this conversation between Samuel the prophet and God...

1 Samuel 8:6 But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD.

1 Samuel 8:7 And the LORD told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.

1 Samuel 8:8 As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you.

1 Samuel 8:9 Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights."

So the people of Israel had a history of rejecting God, so it's not surprising that many of them would reject the Messiah when He came not as an earthly king, but as God in the flesh, a humble King of Hearts!

And what about us now?

Have we allowed God to be the King of our Hearts? Have we not as a nation allowed things and celebrities to be more celebrated than God? Look at how we clamor for things and celebrities, and political leaders! It's scary, but there are people on both sides of the political spectrum that would love nothing more than to have a king who would force the viewpoints they share on others. God's Word says...

Rom 8:6 The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace;

Rom 8:7 the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.

It would be far better if we could learn to trust God's desires for us!

Psa 37:4 Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Psa 37:5 Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this:

Psa 37:6 He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.

If you are delighting yourself in the LORD, worshiping Him, walking with Him, talking with Him, then He will put the right kinds of desires into your heart! In fact Paul said this...

Gal 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

Gal 5:23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Gal 5:24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

The fifth God thing that we should never ever forget is that...

5. God sacrificed for their salvation!

Acts 13:27 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.

Acts 13:28 Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed.

Acts 13:29 When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb.

Then

The Cross was a hideous thing back in the day of Christ. It was the tool used to execute criminals. It symbolized condemnation, evil, punishment, and death. The Cross was not something to be embraced, it was something to avoid at all cost. Most would run from the cross. And most did.

Mat 26:55 At that time Jesus said to the crowd, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me.

Mat 26:56 But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

While the others were betraying, denying and running away from the Cross, Jesus did the unthinkable...He ran the opposite way! He was the ultimate first responder! He ran into the fire of sin and destruction to save those who were losing their lives to the bondage of Satan. He entered the realm of darkness and death to set the captives free. He took up the Cross and carried it!

Why did He do it?

Heb 12:2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

And what was the joy set before Him? The joy was that you and I would have the opportunity to become sons and daughters of God, restored, redeemed, regenerated, renewed! And this leads us to this question...

And what about us now?

Luke 9:23 Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.

Luke 9:24 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.

Luke 9:25 What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?

Are we willing to take up our cross? What does that mean? Are we to carry a literal wooden cross on our shoulders as we go to school, to work, to the gym? Or does it mean that we never allow the sacrifice that Jesus made on the old rugged cross to escape us and that we never stop letting what Jesus did on that cross for us, change us! Change our attitude, our behavior, our priorities, our purpose, our goals in life, and change our despair to hope, and our fears to confidence! Are we willing to take up our cross so that we can use it to crucify our bitterness, hate, lust, anger, greed, insincerity and unforgiveness, so that through the power of Jesus Christ we can be resurrected to new life in this world and to eternal life in the next!! But here's the sixth and final God thing which we see in the life of Israel and it is still true today...

6. God allowed rejection!

Acts 13:44 On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.

Acts 13:45 When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying.

Acts 13:46 Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "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.

Then

Notice it says "Since you reject it (the Word of God), eternal life, salvation. God had chosen the Jews for a special calling and mission. He had loved them with all His heart! He had met their needs in spite of their sinful rebellion. He wanted them to receive His mercy, His grace, His forgiveness, and His love! But many of them outright rejected the message!

What did they reject? Paul tells us in our text...

Acts 13:38 "Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.

Acts 13:39 Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.

They rejected that! Why did they reject it?

God's Word tells us this in Isaiah...

Isaiah 65:2 All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations—

Isaiah 65:3 a people who continually provoke me to my very face...

They allowed their sin to blind them. Paul says...

Acts 13:27 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.

They were still holding on to the law and their pride, and what they could do to earn or deserve salvation, when God had made it clear that no one can be good enough or do enough to earn salvation! Paul goes on to say this in verse 47&48...

Acts 13:47 For this is what the Lord has commanded us: "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."

Acts 13:48 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 Revised Standard Version and the King James translations say...

...and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.

Ordained means to be set apart. God set apart those who believed. But when you take the NIV translation, "appointed for eternal life," it begs the question? Who is appointed for eternal life? We'll find out as we think about this question...

And what about you now?

Will you embrace the life of mercy and grace that comes through the Cross or will you seek another way? Will you believe and become one of the appointed ones? Many years ago an evangelist was asked about his faith...

"How do you account for the thousands of religions in the world?"

The evangelist stunned the interviewer with his response...

"There are not thousands of religions in the world, only two!"

"One religion says we are saved by doing something, Christianity says we are saved by having something done for us!"

So it's not what I do for God that saves me and gets me into heaven, it's what God did for me when He sent His one and only Son to die on the old rugged cross for me! Here's what He did for us...

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Our salvation, if we chose to accept it, was sealed when Jesus overcame sin on the cross and when He rose from that grave, defeating death and the grave forever. Our text says...

Acts 13:30 But God raised him from the dead,
Acts 13:31 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.
Acts 13:32 "We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers
Acts 13:33 he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus.

Today we celebrate that glorious resurrection, but the resurrection would not have happened if Good Friday had not happened. I was talking with a brother in Christ the other day and he said there's no testimony without a test! Friday was a harrowing test for Jesus but He passed. Jesus said this just a short time before His Crucifixion...

John 12:27 "Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'?
No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.

I was talking to a friend of mine Thursday about why the Friday before Easter is called Good Friday when it was a really difficult day of suffering and death for Jesus! It was a good day for us, but an extremely hard day for Him! As some of you have heard me say before, Jesus was a first responder of sorts. He left the safety of His station in heaven and responded to the call for help here on planet earth! We were drowning in the consequences, guilt, shame and sorrow of our sin! We were surrounded by the flames of hatred, anger, greed, injustice, and we were trapped in despair, depression, discouragement, fear and loneliness. But Jesus, knowing His destiny was an old rugged cross, was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice in order that we might be saved, rescued, forgiven, set free from our bondage. He suffered and died so that we might have hope! He wanted us to be restored back to fellowship with our Heavenly Father! Oh we can reject it, God allows that because He won't force His love on anybody, but it breaks His heart when anyone rejects His offer of salvation and love! If you have a desire to be saved, God put it there and there's no way that you've committed the unpardonable sin. Until you draw your last breath, if there's a desire within you to know Jesus, to be in right relationship with the Father, then God put that desire in your heart! He always takes the initiative in the relationship, but remember, He would never force His love upon you, but He offers!

Your response is your responsibility!

Our text ends with this...

Acts 13:49 The word of the Lord spread through the whole region.
Acts 13:50 But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.
Acts 13:51 So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium.
Acts 13:52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Paul and Barnabas were persecuted and expelled from their region, but they along with the other followers of Christ were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit! Why? Because they knew

Jesus had not only suffered and died on the cross to save them from their sin in this life, but He had risen on the third day, securing their hope for eternal life! So regardless of what the world does to us, let's be filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit as we go through various trials and tests, because we know we have a testimony and it is this...

It's a God Thing!