

“THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD FOR ALL”  
Isaiah 53:1-12, John 1:1-14, Acts 13:13-37  
November 16 & 17, 2024

“A young lady one day was speeding through a small Georgia town. She was traveling 70 miles per hour in a 55 mph speed zone. The police pulled her over and wrote her a ticket that would cost her \$100. She didn’t have the money to pay it and ended up having to go to court over the ticket.

“In the courtroom, the judge said, ‘You were found guilty of going 70 miles an hour in a 55 mile speed zone. You have to pay \$100.’

“The young lady said, ‘I’m guilty, but I can’t pay it. I don’t have \$100.’

“Well, if you don’t pay the ticket, we’ll have to lock you up for the weekend.’

“I can’t pay the ticket, but I don’t want to go to jail. Can you please just have mercy on me?’

“The judge mater-of-factly replied, ‘I can’t change the law. The law says that you’ve got to pay \$100, or you have to spend the weekend in jail. Those are the rules, and I can’t change the rules.’

“Starting to tear up she spoke in a small voice. ‘Isn’t there something you can do? I can’t pay it, but I don’t want to get locked up. Have mercy on me.’

“The judge looked down on her, pushed his chair back from the bench, zipped down his robe, and took it off. He went over to the side, picked up his jacket, and put it on. He walked down and stood beside the girl, reached in his wallet, and brought out a hundred-dollar bill. He put the \$100 bill on the bench, took off his jacket, then went over and picked up his robe. He zipped his robe back up and got back behind his bench.

“Young lady, you’ve been found guilty of going 70 miles per hour in a 55 mile-per-hour

speed zone. The law is the law. I can't change it; the law says you must pay \$100, or spend the weekend in jail. Ah! But I see somebody else has already paid the price.'

“God saw us speeding down the highway of disobedience and sin. We've been found guilty of that sin. So He zipped down the independent use of His deity and put on the jacket of humanity. He came down, died on the cross, and paid the price that you and I could not pay. He picked up the tab, rose from the dead, zipped up his glorified body, and ascended up to heaven.

“The Good News of the Gospel is that a bill we could not pay has already been paid. It has been paid by God Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ. Isn't that GOOD NEWS?!”<sup>1</sup>

It is Good News, indeed. And it is the best news that our whole world needs to hear, or at least experience, so that their hearts may be opened and they may come to know the Lord Jesus Christ. But, as always, the question for each one of us is, will we share this great Good News with those around us? Or will we keep it to ourselves, and let those around us continue to struggle as they live lives in disobedience or rebellion to God, the Almighty?

As we look deeper into the Book of Acts, we see that those who experienced Jesus in their lives were so delighted to have found the life that only Jesus can provide, that they shared the goodness of the Lord with those around them. As Jews, they came to realize that Jesus was the One who had fulfilled all of the prophecies of the Scriptures. And when they came to know that Jesus is their Messiah, what joy filled their hearts. They wanted to make sure that everyone they knew, everyone they had contact with, were at least exposed to all that Jesus had done to bring Salvation to the world. Jesus had saved them from the penalty of sin caused by their own disobedience to God's commands. They became free from their guilt, free from the condemnation that came from their actions, all because Jesus had stepped into this world being the Son of God, to bring release to all those who were held captive to the ways of this world. As

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<sup>1</sup> (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans' Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009] pg. 138-139, #416)

they believed that Jesus was their Savior, their hearts were relieved of the burden of trying to earn their own salvation through works of obedience to the Laws of God given through the teachings of Moses and the Prophets.

I invite you to listen to what Paul and Barnabas and those walking alongside of them were able to do. Listen to this next section of Acts, found in chapter 13:13-37. (READ Acts 13:13-37)

The missionary team of Barnabas and Paul moved from the Island of Cyprus back to the mainland of Pamphylia and Pisidia. As was their custom, “*on the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down*” (13:14). They went to worship with the people of the city. They probably didn’t know a single person there in the synagogue, but they were there to worship the Lord God Almighty. If the Holy Spirit was directing them to this missionary adventure, they were to be faithful in obeying God’s command to worship Him on the Sabbath.

Directly after the reading of the Law and the Prophets during that service, the leaders of the synagogue asked Paul and his companions if they had “*a word of exhortation for the people*” (13:15). Paul may have been recognized as a Pharisee in the way that he was dressed. Nonetheless, he was seen as a competent Jew who would be able to give an exhortation that would be based upon the reflection of Scripture. Guided by the Holy Spirit, that exhortation was to encourage, caution or challenge the people further in their faith in the Lord.

So, in the matter of minutes following the Scripture readings, Paul reviewed the great working of God in the lives of the people of Israel, touching on the high points of their history. It wasn’t a long, drawn out history, but a review to capture the minds of the people there in the synagogue (Acts 13:16-22). This was to set up the discussion of how God was still at work in their lives, fulfilling the prophecies of a Savior. Through the promise to King David that God

would bring forth His Messiah, Paul reminds them all how God proclaimed hope for the world, to all those who are faithful in following all of His commands, whether a “*fellow child of Abraham*” or those who are “*God-fearing Gentiles ...*” (13:26).

And then, as if using Isaiah 53 as the model of the Messiah, Paul begins to lay out how God had now brought forth His Messiah to the people of Israel in the Man, Jesus. To all those in the synagogue that day, both Jews and Gentile believers in God, Paul explains how Jesus had come for the Jews and for the whole world. He makes it clear about the Messiah’s intention to save the whole world as he says, “*it is to us [to both Jews and Gentiles] that this message of salvation has been sent*” (13:26b). I don’t know if the Jews caught it right away or not, but Paul was opening up the Salvation of God to the whole world’s population. Jesus didn’t come just for the Jews, but for everyone who believed in Him. He is the Salvation of God that provides forgiveness of our sins and makes us righteous before God once again. It is no longer confined only to the Jews, but is now open to ALL who will believe in Him and receive Him as their Savior. But each person must make their own choice about Jesus; they are not automatically accepted into the family of God. A proclamation has to be made accepting Jesus as their Savior.

Paul reviewed how Jesus was not recognized by the people and rulers of Jerusalem as the Salvation of God, and how they even condemned Him according to the Scriptures (Is. 53). In fact, “*when they had carried out all that was written about Him (Is. 53:4-7), they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. **But God raised Him from the dead...***” (13:29-30).

Everything was fulfilled by Jesus as written in Isaiah 53 about the Suffering Servant of God who would bring salvation to the world!

Now, imagine that you’ve been waiting all your life for news of God providing His

Messiah to you. As a Jew you've read about Him in the Scriptures. You've heard pastors speak about Him in the weekly worship services. You've even heard about individuals who came proclaiming themselves to be the Messiah, only to be exterminated by the government. But as you are sitting in that service on the day that Paul explains all that God has done, and then he proclaims that indeed the Messiah has come for the salvation of the world, wouldn't that get you a bit excited? Wouldn't you want to get to know more about who this man is that Paul was describing? Wouldn't your heart be excited about the real possibility of God having fulfilled His promise?

Then think about it as a Gentile who has come to know and believe in the God of the Jews. You hear Paul tell about God fulfilling His promise to send a Savior who would take away all your sins so that you could become one in the family of God. Your heart has longed to belong in God's family, but you're not a Jew. As Paul opens up the Salvation of God to ALL people, wouldn't that begin to encourage you? Wouldn't you want to hear more about how God has sent His Savior for ALL people - even you?

I would think that everyone there in that synagogue that day would be so interested in getting more information so that they could put their hope and trust in Jesus. Especially when Paul tells about Jesus' death and resurrection, how His disciples experienced the surprising events that Jesus performed in the following 40 days before His ascension. This is what they had been waiting for all of their lives! God had brought forth His Messiah, and He is for everyone!

Paul goes on to explain that Jesus was not just an ordinary human being, but God in the flesh, come to be like one of us to help us to understand the things of God. Jesus came to the earth unlike any other man, so that through His sinless life, He could become the perfect sacrifice for all of humanity. In His death on the cross, Jesus took all of our sins upon Himself to pay the

sin debt that we could not pay, in order to bring us back to the Lord God Almighty, redeemed and restored in His image.

And Paul informs us that when He died, Jesus didn't just rot away in the tomb like every other human. God raised Him up from the dead, Jesus having paid the eternal penalty for our sins, in order to give us hope of what we have to look forward to when we put our trust in Him as our Savior. Jesus put death to death so that we have no more need to fear the grave. When we have faith in Jesus Christ, even when our earthly life here is finished, we will continue to live on with Jesus as a Child of God and a brother and sister with Jesus. Death has no more victory over us. Death has no more sting, for when we finish our lives here, we go into the presence of the Lord, to be with Him forever. Our sleep in death will be short compared to the eternity of life with Jesus. On that day when Jesus will call all of His own to Himself, we will be with Him to enjoy eternal life!

But there's a catch to this whole scenario. There are conditions to this Good News. We must not only believe that Jesus is the Savior; we must receive Jesus into our lives as our Savior. And then we must follow Jesus all the days of our lives so that we might be His living witnesses to the rest of the world of the hope and assurance we have in Him. Everyone needs to know about Jesus being our Savior so that they also have a chance to believe, receive and follow Him, too.

You see, Salvation in Jesus Christ is not for us individually, but for the world. When Jesus ascended into heaven, He gave each of us as His follower, the charge to take His Word of life and love to the peoples of the world so that everyone might have the chance to know Him, and receive Him as their Savior. That's why, week after week, I invite you to grow in your faith in Jesus so that you might become so bold in Him that people know you are one of His followers

without you even saying anything. But then as you tell your story of how Jesus changed your life, they can know for sure that it is Jesus that is needed in their own life, too. And then you can lead them to become a follower of Jesus.

But we are also to tell others about the most exciting thing in our lives. Unfortunately for us today, Jesus is not the most exciting thing in us. In fact, most of us would rather talk about almost anything else, even politics, rather than tell another person about Jesus. It's almost as if we are ashamed of having Him as our Savior. Yet the Gospels and the Book of Acts are in our Bibles for the sole reason of helping us to see what the Lord Jesus has done for us, and to get so excited about that that we can't help but share Him with those around us. What greater excitement is there than Jesus rescuing us from our sin and providing us with eternal freedom?

As followers of Jesus, we are to give our lives over to Jesus each and every day of our lives. Our baptism is not enough to save us. Our completing the class of confirmation of Jesus in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade is not enough to grant us Salvation. That's only the beginning of our walk with Jesus. And membership in the life of a church is not enough for us to claim that we are children of God. We must make Jesus Christ Savior and Lord of our lives, each day humbling ourselves to His authority as our Savior, and remembering His sacrifice on our behalf on the cross so that we could be His brother or sister. That's what gives us salvation - letting Jesus be not only the Savior of our lives, but also becoming the Lord of our lives, guiding and directing our every thought, our every action and our every word.

That's really what the church is to be about, sharing the Gospel message of Jesus' Salvation for the world. It's not about as one particular church, or us as a denomination, but rather about us fulfilling God's work of calling all people to Himself. Think of the people here in Sheboygan that need to hear the Good News of Jesus. How can we reach out to them? How can

we give them the hope that we have? How can we help them to learn about Jesus so that they can receive Him as their Savior, too? How can we build into the lives of those around us so that we can make disciples of Jesus Christ, not only here in Sheboygan, but throughout the county, all around Wisconsin, everywhere in the United States, and all over the world? Those are the questions that we need to begin to address. How can we become a part of completing the Great Commission of taking the Good News of Jesus to every corner and nook and cranny of the world? That's our call as a follower of Jesus.

Well, that may mean that we shift our priorities a bit from focusing on ourselves and this church, to looking outward to those who have not yet heard or accepted Jesus as their Savior. It may involve that we grow in our understanding of who Jesus is, and learn more about how we can reach out to those around us. It may mean that we begin meeting in study and accountability groups to encourage one another. It may mean that we all begin to put some stock in the game as missionaries to our world, beginning right here.

As we commit our lives into the hands of Jesus, by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit in each of our lives, we will be able to work together to fulfill God's plan of the Salvation of the world through Jesus Christ. Are you with me?

Let's pray. Father, thank You for Your Son, Jesus Christ our Savior! It is in Him that we have eternal life. It is in Him that we have hope for today and tomorrow. Move our hearts and minds to become Your people, God-fearing followers of Jesus Christ who are not ashamed of having Jesus as our Lord. Grant us opportunities to learn and grow closer to Jesus so that we might become bold witnesses for You. Forgive us of all our fears and hesitancy to live for You. Guide our hearts to be people after Your own heart, serving You in all our ways so that many more can come to know Jesus through our witness. We pray all this in Jesus' Name. Amen.