

RELIGION

Scripture of the Week

Luke 22:64

Preaching Jesus From The Old Testament

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The text for the Sunday School lesson (International Series) for next Sunday is Acts 13:26-39. We encourage you to attend the Church of your choice this weekend, and study God's Word with His people.

Our Bible lesson this week is part of a sermon preached by the apostle Paul on his first missionary journey. Barnabas and Paul had come to Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:14), so called to distinguish it from the far larger city Antioch (of Syria) where they had previously preached and taught (13:1-3). The smaller Antioch, a highland town in the middle of Asia Minor (present-day Turkey), had strategic importance for the spread of the gospel of Christ. It was the civil and military center of the area, and a Roman Colony, sitting on the main trade routes from Syria to Europe.

Right away Paul and Barnabas sought out the Jewish synagogue and attended the Sabbath meeting. They heard the readings of the Law and the Prophets (two sections of their Bible), and then were invited to bring a "word of encouragement" (13:15) to the assembly. It was not unusual for a visiting teacher to get this privilege; the Jews generally looked forward to receiving a word from their brothers, and Paul gave an address particularly well-suited for this audience. (Compare the synagogue scene in Nazareth, Luke 4:16-30, and the message the Lord Jesus brought on that occasion).

But there was another group present in the synagogue each Sabbath. Paul addresses them as "those who fear God" (13:16,26); this does not mean the Jews didn't fear God, but that there were many Gentiles (non-Jews) who had rejected the idolatry of the Greeks, the Romans, and their local pagan religions, and were attracted to the purity and simplicity of faith in one God,

Creator of heaven and earth. Very few of these God-fearers actually became proselytes (converts) to Judaism, perhaps because of the required rite of circumcision and the legal rituals which had developed around Judaism by the time of Christ.

Recall from Acts 11:19-24 (last week's text) that Barnabas and Saul/Paul were leaders in the first church to actively witness and incorporate Greeks and other Gentiles into the church. Paul fully intended to present the gospel message to Gentiles in this Antioch as well, but he wisely looked for the most receptive people first--both the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles--to establish a base for church growth.

By way of application, we should ask ourselves this question: Am I seeking out those non-Christians who have the most interest in spiritual things, and prayerfully presenting Christ to them? Like Paul, we would not exclude anyone from our witness, but we would recognize God's timing in preparing hearts for the good news of Christ.

When the Lord Jesus sent out his disciples to announce the kingdom of heaven, he instructed them that in each town they should seek out a worthy person (Matt 10:11), a "man of peace" (Luke 10:6), and build their teaching ministry out of that person's house. When God directed Peter to preach to the very first Gentile, he did not pick out a hardened pagan--he chose Cornelius, a "devout and God-fearing" man, who prayed to God and gave generously to the poor (Acts 10:1-4). Though God can miraculously save even the most vile sinner and blasphemer, he often prepares the heart of the sinner to receive the message, and we should not miss the opportunities he prepares for us.

Let's resume our look at Paul's sermon in Antioch. Does it surprise you how much Paul appeals to the history of Israel: the bondage and deliverance from Egypt, the wilderness experience, the

judges and early kings? It shouldn't! In our churches the history of Israel's captivity has long been a point of contact with distress of our people. And the mighty hand of the LORD in the plagues and at the Red Sea has been an indisputable sign of his power to save and preserve his faithful people.

Paul also appealed to the fulfilled prophecies concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This ought also to be a major theme of our witness, especially to the worldly wise skeptic today. The prophecies of the Old Testament are in many cases precisely and unarguably fulfilled in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. They demonstrate that God had indeed spoken through the Psalms and the Prophets, hundreds of years before Christ, and described his birth, life, death and resurrection in detail. This could not be mere chance, or the plot of a deluded rabbi. It was given as proof of the reality of our salvation.

Many do scoff at the idea of a bodily resurrection, and yet buy into reincarnation or some other theory of afterlife. To any open-minded person, who has not yet received the Lord Jesus, I would encourage you to check into the strength of the evidence of fulfilled prophecy in Scripture, and other evidences that Jesus really did rise from the dead (for example, see Acts 13:35-39 in our text, and Psalm 16:10). May I recommend a guidebook which outlines the evidence for you: Evidence That Demands a Verdict by Josh McDowell.

Many who heard Paul's sermon turned against him in jealousy (13:44-45), not because they could refute his teaching. But many others received the gospel (13:48). I'm convinced that most people who refuse to follow Jesus Christ have never seriously considered whether he was all he claimed to be. Don't you think he deserves your careful consideration?

"TWO PATHS"

by Tamika Mouton

Two paths lay before me,
Once long ago,
When summers were long,
And I didn't yet know.

The meaning of heartache,
or recognize pain,
And took it for granted,
That youth would remain.

Two paths lay before me,
And each of them led,
To what I could only,
Imagine, ahead.

Though I wanted to wander,
Down both, for a bit,
Life just shook her head,
And would have none of it.

For one path alone,
Is given each person,
And we must journey down it,
The best that we can.

And whether we win,
Or whether we lose,
Largely depends on, ...
The path that we choose.

Sam Johnson Memorial Scholarship Banquet

The Highland United Church of Christ is again sponsoring the Sam Johnson Memorial Scholarship Banquet on:

Saturday, September 14, 1991
7:00 p.m. - 10 p.m.

Highland's Fellowship Hall

This is our 4th banquet and the 10th year anniversary of the passing of the Rev. Johnson.

The Sam Johnson Memorial Scholarship Fund was established in 1981 in memory of our late pastor. In 1983 additional funds were received from Edith Elliot as a memorial for Wilmar Elliot, a faithful member of Highland. The Rev. Johnson devoted many years of unselfish service helping young and old alike to help build a better future. We have been able to assist over 15

students in obtaining a higher education.

Your assistance will help support even more.

We take pride in being able to assist students when they call on us. For a lot of our students, the church is the extended family. We have a wonderful group of young people at Highland and we will continue our strong support with them.

Our special guest banquet speaker will be Richard Johnson, son of the late Rev. Johnson.

Opal Johnson, Banquet Chairperson

Ella Powell
Pauline Doran
Lessie Williams
The Rev. Cecil Prescod, Pastor



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