

*Words and Deeds: The Line of David*  
*By Jason Huff*  
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*1 Samuel 13:1-14; John 7:37-43; Acts 13:13-23*

Our final Scripture reading today is from Acts 13:13-23. May God add His richest blessings on the reading of His holy Word. "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 synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak." Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: "Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me! 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, he endured their conduct for about forty years in the desert, he overthrew seven nations in Canaan and gave their land to his people as their inheritance. All this took about 450 years. After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet. Then the people asked for a king, and he gave them Saul son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled forty years. 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.' From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised.""

My dad read the last few pages of every book first. I have no idea why he did this; he couldn't explain it. It was just a habit he picked up. Maybe he thought if the ending was good, the journey would be worth it. But just as curious as that habit was, he would always then flip to the front of the book and read it like everyone else. He didn't skip around or start from the middle; it wasn't as if he was looking to solve a puzzle. Even though he had to know the ending, he knew that the only way to get there was from the beginning.

We live in a time when we can watch shows from the very beginning, even ones on decades ago. We were really happy to see *King of the Hill* come on Hulu a week or two ago, and we started where? At the beginning. Even if we start watching a show midway through, we want to know what came beforehand. We want to understand how the characters got where they are, what their backgrounds are, what made them who they are.

Except when it comes to the Bible, and then suddenly we grow a great aversion to knowing the whole thing. We want to know what's important – what I **need** to know. Do I have to know anything about the Old Testament to be saved? Nope? Then I don't need it. Only tell me what I gotta know. And that attitude has been prevalent throughout much of our missionary efforts for the last few hundred years. Get the New Testament translated – send folks copies of one of the Gospels. There are all sorts of Bibles out there for pregnancy resources centers like the one I work at during the week – but we use the *only* one on the market that includes the Old Testament.

Today's passage illustrates for us just how important Paul and the apostles believed the Jewish Scriptures and the stories they tell us to be. There's more we'll investigate together, but I want you to keep in the back of your mind this truth: *the beginning shows us why the middle and ending matter.*

So we're hopping in where we left off, with Saul and Barnabas on the island of Cyprus. They've made a believer of Sergius Paulus, the Roman procurator of the island. The gospel is starting to make inroads with Gentiles as well as Jews. They've covered the island, and now they're headed out. They head north into what is now modern-day Turkey, which is due north of Cyprus. They head first to Perga, then to Pisidian Antioch, after John Mark leaves them.

Luke assumes that his readers know a lot more about what's going on than we actually do, and it's important to understand what's happening here. First, there's been a change of leadership. Notice that for the first time, Luke has switched to calling Saul Paul. It could be because they are traveling in heavily Roman areas, so he's using his Greek name more and more. But there's also a change - the group is called "Paul and his companions." Barnabas found Saul, it was Barnabas that had pretty much brought the group together, and it was Saul and Barnabas together that God had called on this missionary journey. But now, Paul's calling the shots.

It's impossible for us to know why John Mark left, but he *is* Barnabas' nephew. Maybe he didn't like that this new guy was in charge. It's always tough when your cousin who brought you into the company suddenly gets demoted and the new guy on the block takes his place. The attitude of Barnabas, the Son of Encouragement, is very different from the intellectual and sometimes prickly Paul. Or maybe John Mark was just scared and homesick. What Luke doesn't tell us is that the journey ahead is going to be rough. Mountainous terrain, treacherous landscapes, notorious places for bandits to attack caravans. They're heading into dangerous territory, and maybe John Mark's faith just wasn't up to the task yet. We just don't know. Luke doesn't say much about it here, and he never fully explains it, but John Mark's desertion of the fellowship has a big impact later. We will eventually deal with the ramifications.

But all that said...they make it through the mountains. They arrive in Pisidian Antioch. They go to the synagogue on the Sabbath, and the leadership opens up the floor to them. (After all, they have recently been to Jerusalem, they are Jews from Israel proper, so they give them the opportunity to speak.) And Paul takes it. This is his first recorded sermon in the New Testament. And how he preaches shows us fundamentals of how we should approach our faith and teach it to others.

The first thing I want to point out is this: *we as Christians live out the ancient faith.* It's easy to think of Christianity as one of the new kids on the block when it comes to religions. It has a 2000-year history, sure, but of the five major world religions, the only one newer is Islam. And certainly many other ancient religions and spiritual practices were around in the days of Abraham. But Paul does not present Jesus as something brand new; he presents Jesus as the culmination of their Jewish beliefs that go back to the very beginning of human existence. The faith Paul has in Jesus is rooted and grounded in the faith of his ancestors. When he preaches Jesus, he is preaching continuity with what has come before, fulfillment of promises that came before, the arrival of a Messiah consistent with Scriptures that came before.

Our culture loves the new and hates the old. We've gotten through another election cycle where we have a party where many members call themselves "progressives" – they want to move forward as they define it. (Whether they are or not is another question!) We make fun of the culture of the 1980s unless we've made it new and dressed it up. In my gamer's group, we regularly mention movies, and films that came out before the year 2000, it's like they never existed. There are no shared points of reference.

We don't like people acted or thought in the past, either. We aren't willing to understand things from their perspective, so we throw it out. There is a dangerous movement in the modern church that wants to throw out the Old Testament as too difficult, too thorny, not enough of the explicit love of God, not enough "positive and encouraging" as we want it. Even if we say we love the whole Bible, many of us never read the Old Testament intentionally. We may not intentionally throw it out, but we do in practice.

But without the Old Testament, you have no God. You have no Jesus. You have no Holy Spirit. They have no point of reference, no context. Without the Old Testament, you don't even understand why there is a need for a Savior. Without the Old Testament, what is sin? How is it defined? Who is God and what does He want from us, expect from us? The only way you can know is with the Old Testament. The New Testament constantly references the Old Testament. The only reason the New Testament can make sense on its own is through those references. And while someone can understand the basics, if we're supposed to be in relationship with God, why would we abandon over 2/3rds of what He's said to us?

Paul is in a synagogue. These people know the Old Testament story backwards and forwards. He is not teaching them anything they do not know. Today's part of Paul's sermon is virtually all note-for-note what the Jewish leaders would have said. The only difference is the last line, that Jesus is the awaited Savior from David's line. But Paul is not wasting his breath. He lays out the foundations everyone knows so that all will see that faith in Christ is the logical next step in Judaism. It's not a separate religion. It's not a new religion. It's the fulfillment of everything promised in the faith of Abraham.

Here's the next thing I saw in this passage today: *God is the center of the Old Testament Scripture, and He means to be the center of our lives.* Back when I was a kid, I remember having a couple of records of the Bible story. (Amazing how things like records come back, isn't it?) I'd put those on and listen to them. And I really loved the Old Testament stories. They were easy to follow, at least the way the story was re-written, and the heroes of the faith were front and center. Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Samson, David, Elijah and Elisha.

Their stories are presented pretty straightforwardly in Scripture too. These are men we should look up to in many ways. Hebrews 11 goes through a list of the ancient people of faith, and they're called the "great cloud of witnesses." We honor them. They're just ordinary human beings like you and me, but their legacy reminds us of our commitment, that through Christ, we want to be faithful like they were.

But Paul here shows us the deeper truth: God is behind everything. God chose Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; God brought prosperity to the twelve tribes of Israel in Egypt, and once they were enslaved, it was God who led them out. God was the one who put up with their reckless rejection and constant moaning for forty years. God was the one who ejected the nations from Canaan so His people would have a home. God gave the nation judges and prophets. When the Israelites begged for a king, God gave them one like the kings of all the nations – Saul, strong, charismatic, a head taller than many of his men. And God replaced that king with a king after His own heart – David son of Jesse. And now God has given the nation a Savior, Jesus, through the lineage of David.

Now the Old Testament has some grisly stories; it has many troubling bits. But read it closely and you'll see that most of the hard bits are first and foremost honest and realistic, and then they're wrapped around the actions of sinful, selfish human beings. God often deals harshly with humanity because we're so corrupt, so debased, that the difficult path is the only one that is both merciful and just.

But if you pay attention to the story behind the story...if you start looking for what God is doing in each scenario...you'll see over and over again God's immense love and grace throughout history. It's His story. The story of Abraham and the sacrifice of his son Isaac is not so much about the faithfulness of a man who would do anything to please God. It's the story of God who puts Abraham through a test that all the other nations around had to their gods, but at the climax, unlike all the other demonic gods that required a blood sacrifice, God stops Abraham's hand and lets him sacrifice a ram in place of his son. God acts differently from all the other pagan deities.

The story of Israel isn't about God choosing the best and brightest and the most saintly folks to be in His Kingdom, and it's certainly not about their worthiness – their radical rebellion in the desert proves that. God chooses for Himself a people because that's His nature. He tells Moses in Exodus 33, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." God loves because that's who He is, and rather than let humanity die out because our rebellion, He chooses some to make His own.

And when we see God at the center of the Jewish Scripture and Jewish life, we start to see how Jesus intends to transform us. God was never meant to be a side dish to life, a seasoning or a flavoring. He's the whole meal. Heroes of the faith come and go, they live and die, but God always remains. He is central not only to the Old Testament story, He is meant to be the center of our lives. Have you ever thought of having mustard and ketchup for dinner? Sounds disgusting, right? But that's what we do. We try to feast on the condiments, the little things that God gave us to enjoy in this life, and we think that's the meal! No! God meant for us to enjoy His love and peace and mercy forever. When He calls us to die to ourselves, it's not so that we'll be miserable. It's so we can live in His joy. It's so we'll put down the ketchup bottle of life's pleasures to enjoy the steak of God's fullness.

Last thing we're going to discuss today: *God is still seeking to make Davids*. We heard this morning the fateful story of King Saul from 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 13. Saul was everything you'd want a warrior king to be, humanly speaking. But there's a gigantic problem that loses Saul the Kingdom of Israel after 40 years, and that's his stubborn self-reliance and impatience with God.

Saul doesn't hate God. He believes he needs God on his side. The problem is, he's on his own schedule. When Samuel the prophet hasn't shown up to make the sacrifice to God and the battle lines are being drawn, Saul takes it into his own hands. He makes the sacrifice to God, but in doing so, he disobeys God's command for the appropriate man to do it! Saul's rashness and unwillingness to turn to God precisely when he needs to make him an unfit king for Israel.

God chooses David...not because he's perfect. He will make huge mistakes as king, ones that are disobedient to God. God chooses David even though he is the *ha qaton*, the youngest one, literally the insignificant or worthless one, the one no one had expectations for because of his seven older brothers. God chooses David as He does everyone – out of His mercy and grace.

And yet, David is special. David is a man after God's own heart, who wants what God wants and will do what God wants. God doesn't describe David's heart as gentle or loving or a lot of things we associate with a "heart" today. His heart is God's heart because he does God's desires. Sounds an awful lot like Jesus, right? In *everything*, Jesus put His Father's will first. David can't match that standard, but Jesus is from that faithful man's line.

God didn't commend David because he was a *nice* guy, because he held the door open at the palace for women or because he was a good dad or kind ruler. It was all about David being willing to feast at the Lord's table, doing what God said, avoiding that which He didn't. David wouldn't touch King Saul, even though Saul tried to kill him numerous times, because Saul had been anointed God's chosen King and David so respected God. David wanted to build God His temple, and God was pleased that he would desire that, even though the job would fall to a man of peace – David's son Solomon. At his most terrible, when David was confronted with his sin, he told the truth and repented of his wickedness, crying out to God for forgiveness.

Here's the thing: because of Jesus, living a life like David's is not so unique and rare. We have the Holy Spirit as our constant companion and guide, revealing to us the wisdom and words of the Father and Son. We have the complete testimony of what God is doing in our world. Where once we had little hope of redemption, now we have great hope. We are in a far better time and place than David to serve the Lord faithfully! And while Christ is always our goal, David shows us a faithful way to be like Him. Not people who do everything right, but people who make God's will their first purpose in life. And as Paul continues next week, we will see how Christ's coming changes everything so that a heart like David's is not uncommon, but promised to everyone who would come to Jesus in faith and repentance.

The beginning of the story matters because it reveals to us the true nature of God – loving, kind, and faithful even when His people are not – and the nature of Scripture – always pointing us to our God. The beginning matters because it proves we are part of the ancient faith of Abraham. And the beginning matters because it even shows us faithful examples of believers before Christ – one in particular, David, whose faithfulness is perfected in the Messiah.