

Focusing on the word of God

13-15 – enter the synagogue; there's reading from the Law and the Prophets

16-22 – “fellow Israelites & Gentiles who worship God”; God “chose” – Egypt- deliverance- God endures disobedience of people; gives them the land; God gives them judges; then a king; first Saul then David; “he will do everything I want him to do” – but he won't

23-32 – from David came Jesus; spoken of by John the Baptist; Jesus not recognised by the Jewish people and leaders; condemned; got Pilate to execute him; crucified him and laid him in a tomb; God raise him; now those who saw him are witnesses to everyone; Good news – God has fulfilled what he promised our ancestors

33-37 – David died and decaying; Jesus died but raised and not decaying

38-41 – **forgiveness of sins is proclaimed; set free from sin; don't be like the scoffers.** – this is reality for us, the impact for us

42-48 – People want to hear more; next Sabbath “the whole city” gathers to hear the word of the Lord – Jews jealous, contradict and abuse Paul; P & B turn to the Gentiles because Jews reject word of God; Gentiles glad; all appointed for eternal life believed.

49-52 – word of God spread; more persecution; go to Iconium; disciples filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

I was looking at an interview with Louis Zamperini this week. It's a great story. He runs in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, actually shakes hands with Hitler. In WW2 he's in the US Air Force. The plane crashes in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. He and two others survive. During the 47 days when they're in this raft, Louis says he cried out to God to save him; he gets captured by the Japanese and is a prisoner of war for 2.5 years. Somehow he survives that. Everyday he cries out to God to save him. When he goes back to America he forgets his cries to God. We're going to hear the rest of Louis' story later so keep listening.

But there is a segway here. I mentioned a couple of weeks ago that we as Christians are in a war – a war with spiritual powers and rulers. Louis was certainly in a war and we are too. And one of the weapons in this war that we are to use is the word of God.

In Ephesians 6 Paul says we are to **put our armour on, we're on a battlefield.** The **Word...** is described here as one of the **Spirit's weapons.** It's Deadly, sharp. The Spirit has ordinary people like you and me **teaching the Word, speaking the Word, sharing the gospel of Jesus;** that's the way the **Spirit does battle.** Have a look, Ephesians 6:17:

Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

And we saw it played out last week in Acts. Sergius Paulus **believes...** for he's amazed at the **teaching about the Lord**. He's cut through **by the Spirit's sword**.

Now listen. At times you might think that's a **bit dull**. At times you might be thinking you wouldn't mind a few more people **struck blind**; a bit more **drama**. But for **Sergius Paulus** it's the **Word that's exciting**.

And **penetrating**.

Today, in our passage as you look ahead at what **Paul's preaching** actually **looks like in more detail** in Pisidian Antioch, you might think is **highly unlikely**. Because to our eyes and ears, Paul's **sermon**, Paul's **teaching** as it's detailed from verse 16 may not look entirely **riveting**. In fact, maybe even dull.

We're going to read through this passage and I'll stop at various points, so follow this with me in your bible or the Bulletin sheets. **READ v.13-15**

So, v. 14 Paul and Barnabas arrive at Pisidian Antioch And as they usually do, because they always **start with the Jews**, they go to the synagogue and sit down.

After the readings Paul's invited to speak. That's what the Spirit wants – it's a response to the readings from God's word.

Read v.16-19

When you look at what he says, and it's worth working through in detail, it's kind of a **potted summary** of the Old Testament. From Abraham through to slavery in Egypt in the book of Exodus, to the **conquest** of the **promised land** in Joshua. And then the **judges** and **Samuel**.

As you watch him there in verse 17 to 19, he's tracking through the Old Testament **book by book**.

But the big question is, what does the Spirit actually want Paul to **say...** from the **law and the prophets**? More than that, what's the Spirit want him to say about **Jesus**, from the Law and the Prophets?

Now some of us have been doing an overview of the Old Testament so we can understand what God is saying in it. Three things that the Spirit wants **all of us** to see in the pages of the Old Testament.

a) A royal history **leading to Jesus** -

b) An unfulfilled expectation **fulfilled by Jesus**

c) A non working solution to sin **fixed by Jesus**

OR a) the Christian message is no novelty. The ministry of Jesus was the outworking of God's long-standing plan

b) God has chosen to fulfil his saving plan through the leader he has appointed, Jesus.

c) the forgiveness of sins and a new freedom to serve God are made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

I'm not going to cover these in a huge amount of detail. And in some ways these aren't exactly the kind of points you might **lead with** talking to your mates at the pub or the girls over coffee. They're points that are purpose built for the **audience Paul's talking to** in the synagogue. But the point is that when Paul by the **Spirit is preaching the Word...** at every point it's **all about Jesus**.

Look at the first point. He's set the scene with Israel's **history**. Verse 21, he gets to **the kings**. Saul. Forty years. And then **David**, the man after **God's own heart**; "he will do everything I want him to" – well, he doesn't!! Is there a king who will? No, not until Jesus.

And there's the point. From David it's just a quick step, **a family line**, that stretches all the way to **Jesus**. Verse 23:

From this David's descendants God has brought to Israel the Saviour Jesus, as he promised.

The story of the Old Testament, Paul says, it's a **history** - that leads **straight to Jesus**. Even though, as Paul says, the rulers of Israel in verse 27 **didn't recognise him** and they **condemned him**, just as the **prophets said they would**.

Point 2. In v.32-37 is basically saying, there were prophecies in the Bible that seemed to be saying that David, the king of Israel would reign forever, but that was never fulfilled. In v.35 which quote David's Psalm 16 what does it say: "You will not let your holy one see decay." Did David die and his body decay? Read v.36 – "Now when David had served God's purposes in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his ancestors and his body decayed."

So these words about king David - it seems they were **never fulfilled**.

But get this, verse 37 – *But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay*. And so Paul is saying this Jesus who I am proclaiming to you; **he rose from the dead; he did not see decay**.

He's the one that's been prophesied. So, all you Jews sitting here, this is God's promise being fulfilled. He has come!!

And that leads to the third thing the Spirit wants us to see in the Scriptures:

that **everything else** that **didn't work** in the scriptures is **now fixed** and **replaced** by something that does. And that's the thing that most makes sense for us today.

Most especially, and this could easily get Paul into some **hot water**, as it **does** just a little bit later... **the Spirit wants Israel to see that the law of Moses...** the **scriptures that** have just been **read in the synagogue...** the laws in **our Old Testament books** like **Leviticus** and **Numbers** and **Deuteronomy...** if you're looking to be **justified...** if you're looking to be **righteous before God** and to be **right with God...** they just **never worked**.

See, the Jews were just desperately trying to **put things right** by **keeping the rules** when things are **profoundly wrong**.

Now we might not be thinking that we need to keep every Jewish law, but I know that there are many people that carry a burden of guilt with them. Maybe it's because they didn't care for their kids; or they let someone down with a promise they made; or they lied or cheated on their wife or husband. And then there are people who carry a burden of hate, of unforgiveness ("I just can't forgive that person"). Life is messy isn't it? But Paul says here in v.38 that "through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you." Jesus looks at us in v.39 and says, "through **ME** everyone who believes is set free from every sin. And this is a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses".

Now you might not be thinking too much about the law of Moses. But it's true that a lot of people say, "Look I'm trying my best to live a good life. I'm really working hard at cleaning up my life." But it's not good enough. Let me explain it this way.

It's like if you've **run through a red light** and smashed a pedestrian and you feel so bad about it that you keep driving and from that point on you **only ever drive through green lights**. That you absolutely **carefully stop at every amber**. In fact if you're like the Jews they hedged around their laws so you'd stop **even before it went amber**. You'd actually invent a **new colour**, greeny yellow, that came before the amber, and you'd **stop for that**.

Trouble is, **keeping the law like that doesn't undo the wrong that's been done**.

Doesn't bring **forgiveness for what's gone before**.

Just kind of moves you further and further away from the scene of the crime. Further and further from the point of **forgiveness**. When the Highway Patrol finally pulls you over they're not going to give you a **pat on the back** for all the **green lights you drove through**. It's all about the **red**.

Which is how the **laws of Israel always worked**. And that's how it is for us.

So what Paul is saying here is this:

That **through Jesus**, and only through Jesus, those who believe can be **justified**, can be free from guilt; in a way they never could before.

So let me ask you, what are you **doing...** with **your guilt**?

See, that's a question the **Holy Spirit** is **deeply interested in**.

Where are you going to find **your forgiveness of sins**?

That's what the **Holy Spirit** wants to know.

And it's because Jesus died **for your sins**, and it's because Jesus was **raised as the never-to-decay one of God** as the one **qualified to deal with sins**, the **Holy Spirit** wants you to know that. The Holy Spirit wants you to know that forgiveness of sins and a new freedom to serve God are only made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

And there'll be two types of responses; as we see in the rest of this passage.

Some will **scoff at that**. v.41 and there's many of those today – “you can't believe all that stuff about Jesus”; “Christianity is just for the weak and helpless”. “That all happened a long time ago”. You may have heard these lines from your friends and family. Paul is saying, “Jesus has done something you would never believe – he has risen from the dead”. But there were still people who refuse to listen and actively opposed. Look what happens, **Read v. 42-45**. People want to hear. The next Saturday it's like the **whole city** gathers to hear what?, do you notice, **the Word of the Lord**.

That's the job we saw back at the start that the **Spirit sent them to do**. To **preach the Word of the Lord**, the **good news about Jesus**. The died and risen **holy one of God**, forgiver of sins, giver of life.

And yet there are **some Jews** full of jealousy who stir up the crowd. Abusive. Which brings for Paul and Barnabas a **huge change of focus**.

Verse 46, Paul and Barnabas say to the Jews, tragic words

We **had to speak the Word of God to you first**. But since you reject it and don't consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we **now turn to the Gentiles**. And so v.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**.

Which again, is **where we come in**. This is **us**. Gentiles. And from that point, that's the focus. **Gentiles like you and me**.

And the **Word of the Lord**, the **Sword of the Spirit**, just keeps going **on and on and on**.

When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and **honored the Word of the Lord**; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. All who God had chosen before the creation of the world they received life.

And verse 49,

The Word of the Lord spread through the whole region.

While the Jews stir up more and more trouble and expel them from the region, and they head to Iconium where we **end where we started**. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the **Holy Spirit**.

Teaching the Word, the word with a **floodlight on Jesus** is at the heart of what we're on about here at Tregear. Remember, that's what the Holy Spirit does. It's the **Sword of the Spirit**.

And we're not a church that just wants to fill you full of **head knowledge and facts**. We want to see the **Spirit** taking the **Word of the Lord** and giving each of us understanding of it and then helping us it live it out.

We're not **teaching the Word** to make you feel guilty or to **sink you under a pile of laws**, but to **highlight Jesus**. In Jesus we can know freedom. We don't have to live in the guilt of things we've done on the past – Jesus wipes the slate clean.

The Holy Spirit works through the Word.

Back to **Louis Zamperini's** story. He came back from the prisoner of war camp **emotionally scarred**. He was **bitter** and he was **cynical**. And night after night there were the **nightmares** about what he'd seen and he'd been through.

And only **begrudgingly** let his wife drag him along to hear Billy Graham preach in LA in 1949. He came back a second night.

And he says instead of slipping out early like he intended to, when **Billy invited people** to commit their lives to the Lord Jesus, he said **the Holy Spirit gripped his heart**. And he **repented of his sin** and gave his life **wholly to the Lord Jesus Christ**.

He says, **within a matter of moments...** my **life was changed forever**. Since that night, he says, I never had another nightmare about my captivity. The Lord **radically transformed me**.

And he says, ever since then, and Louis is now 94 years old, ever since then he's been **speaking** - not only about his war experiences but how the **Word of God...** cut through to his heart **by the Spirit of God** and that day grabbed hold of him and changed him for good. As the word of God was preached the Holy Spirit cut through, just like it did to those Jews and Gentiles 2000 years ago as Paul told them about Jesus.

Can God's word cut through to our hearts today?

What would it look like for me in my family, my job, my relationships, my choices, my use of time if God's word was at work in my heart?

What would it look like in my life for the Spirit to turn my heart towards Jesus? To turn my trembling Words to a friend into something **powerful** and **sharp** and **lifechanging** when we absolutely **least expect it**.