

God's Gracious Ways.
Acts 13:13-25.
Sunday morning, October 31, 2010.

Paul and his party leave Cyprus and come to Perga and continue land- inward to Antioch. Antioch was a Roman colony; its people enjoyed the status and privileges of Roman citizens. It was the major and most influential city in the area, and had a sizable Jewish population. Extra Biblical sources reveal that Sergius Paulus, the governor of Cyprus, who had come to faith in Christ, was from Antioch. His family and friends were there. He may well have given them recommendations and contacts in Antioch.

Paul's address to the people in the synagogue of Antioch constitutes his first recorded sermon in the book of Acts. Paul's sermon had three parts: God's gracious ways in Israel's history; God's grace in sending Jesus to them; the implications, applications, and exhortations flowing from this. Each section begins with an appeal to the people: "Men of Israel, and you who fear God (Jews, Proselytes and God-fearing gentiles.)"

Today we look at God's gracious ways in Israel's history.

I. Grace in Egypt and the Exodus.

In Paul's treatment of Israel's history in this sermon he emphasizes the grace of God and only indirectly refers to the peoples' rebellious hearts, stubbornness and unbelief.

A. God chose them.

"The God of this people Israel chose our fathers..."

Underneath God's gracious dealings with His people there is always the election of God. That is where it all began for Israel, and that is where it all begins for you too. "In the beginning God..." That is how the Bible begins; that is how creation begins, and that is how redemption begins as well.

B. He exalted the people.

He multiplied them exceedingly; Exodus 1:7,9. He even blessed the hard labor of slavery to them for when they left Egypt there was not a feeble one among them. Psalm 105:37. When God's grace is at work even slavery and oppression must work blessing in the lives of God's people. Are you undergoing hardships and evils? Humble yourself under God's mighty hand and ask Him to introduce grace in the midst of your difficulties, and then patiently let the difficulties do their work.

C. He delivered them with an uplifted (mighty) hand.

The Lord has placed boundaries on our evils; He knows how and when to deliver us. Whatever the evils are, we may know (1) The Lord has placed boundaries on them. (2) The Lord knows how and when to deliver us; His arm is not shortened. (3) In the meantime our hardships must work for our good and bless us.

D. He put up with their ways (in the wilderness.)

Other manuscripts read "He carried them gently." Both are true.

He was a providing and protecting Father to them, who put up with a lot of childishness and immaturity on their part, yet also sought to help them grow up and mature. Does He not interact with you this way still today?

II. Grace during the conquest and the period of the Judges.

- A. During the conquest they drove out nations far stronger than they; nations with iron chariots, with giants, and well defended cities. The Lord came alongside His people and fought their battles for them as long as they walked close beside Him, and served His purposes.

And is the Lord not the same today? Will he not come alongside you and fight your battles for you? Only wait on Him; seek Him, draw near to Him, and seek to serve His purposes. “Those who wait (as in serving) on the Lord will renew their strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles; they will walk and not be weary; they will run and not faint.” Isaiah 40:31.

- B. During the period of the Judges.

Israel did not stay close besides the Lord. Time and again they strayed from Him only to find that only by the Lord’s side were provision and protection to be found. Yet time and again the Lord would restore them to Himself through the ministry of His servants the Judges.

Are you learning the same thing as Israel? Have you lost your way? Are troubles besetting you on every side? Remember that with the Lord there is restoring grace. The Lord’s table is the place to take inventory; to take our proper place by the Lord’s side once more with humility and confession, and to find His restoring grace and favor once more.

III. Grace during the period of the kings.

In Samuel’s days the people demanded a king just like the nations around them, and prior to the time the Lord was ready to give them a king. The Lord dealt with them like children, and gave them what they wanted in Saul, only to remove Him for David, the man after God’s own heart, choosing, and timing.

Are there things you desire from the Lord but are unwilling to wait for? Good things; things agreeable to the will of God, like a king. A good indication would be the anger rising up in your heart when you are made to do without your desired blessing once again, or envy when others receive and you are made to wait. Be patient, believing and humble during these times and let the Lord bring blessing into your life from his own heart, choosing, and timing.

IV. Grace when John the Baptist introduced the Savior – Jesus.

- A. David was a man after God’s own heart, doing all the will of God, but only in type. Jesus alone, David’s seed, was the man after God’s own heart, and doing all the will of God in reality.

- B. Only in Jesus came fullness of grace and truth. John testified of Jesus’ greatness when he said: “There comes One after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to loose.” (A most menial task reserved for the lowest slave.)

Rightly understood there is an awesome sense of privilege and unworthiness associated with even the lowest act of service done in Jesus’ Name, even when this act is done to the lowest and the least of His children.

The grace exhibited at the Lord’s table would impart something to us of this privilege and unworthiness.