

THE STORY
CHAPTER 29
STUDY 29

The story so far ...

The Church at Antioch set Paul and Barnabas apart as missionaries. They went to Cyprus. Their emphasis was the Jewish synagogues. They had a meeting scheduled with the proconsul. A sorcerer opposed them. In Jesus name Paul struck him with blindness for a period of time. The proconsul was impressed with the power of God and became a Christian. After this they moved on to Pisidian Antioch. Once again Paul went to the synagogue to teach.

Paul preached about the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. He made it clear that this was in fulfilment of what God had promised their Jewish forefathers. Paul proclaimed forgiveness through Jesus. Many were converted from Judaism to Christianity. The following Sunday Paul was once again at the synagogue but faced severe opposition. From then on Paul started to include Gentiles in his evangelism focus. Paul and Barnabas were expelled from the city.

They continued making the synagogues their first port of call. This was a convenient meeting place. They continued to enjoy mixed results. Among the Gentiles there was opposition to the gospel as well. This opposition was often economically motivated. Christians stopped buying the lucky charms which impacted on the profits of those making them.

At Iconium Paul and Barnabas once again preached in the synagogue. There were mixed results. Some sided with the Jews and others with the apostles. When word got out that there were plans to stone Paul and Barnabas, they fled the city to Lystra. Here Paul healed a man who had been lame from birth. The people wanted to worship Paul and Barnabas as being Roman gods. This of course distressed them, and even when they tried to give glory to God, that people still continued to want to worship them. It was in Lystra that Paul was attacked by the mob and left for dead. Paul returned to the city when he revived and then left for Derbe. This was the last city they visited on this missionary journey. They returned via the cities they had been before and finally returned to the home base in Antioch.

Back at Antioch Paul found that the Jews were insisting that the Gentile converts keep the Jewish laws and customs. A meeting was convened in Jerusalem. At this meeting Paul's view prevailed – Gentile converts did not have to follow Jewish customs. They were Christians not Jewish proselytes. Sadly Paul and Barnabas had a fall out over whether John Mark should come with on the next journey. Barnabas continued with John Mark, and Paul was joined by Silas for the next journey. Timothy also became part of Paul's group. After hearing from God in a dream, they headed for Philippi.

The first convert at Philippi was Lydia. Also while in Philippi they were confronted by a demon possessed slave girl. They cast the demon out. The owners of the slave girl were then unable to make money out of her and so they stirred up trouble. Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into jail. While they were in jail there was an earthquake and all the doors of the jail were opened. Paul stopped the jailer from committing suicide – he feared that the prisoners would escape and he would be disgraced. The jailer was converted. It was at Philippi that Paul first invoked his Roman citizenship, and demanded to be treated as a Roman.

Thessalonica was the next big place where Paul spend time. As usual Paul started preaching in the synagogue with some success. But he also faced opposition and a mob attacked him. The believers persuaded Paul to leave and he and Silas went to Berea. He faced the same mixed crowd, having some success but also stirring up opposition. He left there and continued to Athens where he was confronted by the philosophical thinkers. It was here that Paul preached his famous “to the unknown god” sermon on Mars Hill. Once again some believed, some were sceptical, whilst others opposed to Paul. Paul’s task was to now find key people who would be able to lead the churches that were being established.

Paul went to Corinth where he met Priscilla and Aquila, also a tent maker with whom he stayed. The Jews continued to oppose Paul. It was there that Paul decided to preach only to the Gentiles in future. Paul left the synagogue and started preaching to the Gentiles. In a vision God assured Paul that he should continue preaching for he had many people in that city. Paul remained in Corinth for a year and a half.

Paul cared for the churches that he had planted. He wrote to them giving them guidance and instruction. While at Corinth he wrote a letter to the church at Thessalonica. It was a positive letter to the church commending them for their love and for their positive witness in the community. From the letter it seems that there had been a time of no communication with the church. This was sorted out and Timothy finally brought news of the church to Paul and he was grateful for it. The letter also has a passage dealing with the second coming of Jesus.

While at Corinth Paul also started the church and built it up. From Corinth Paul sailed to Syria and on to Ephesus where he lived with Priscilla and Aquila. He continued to Jerusalem to greet the church and then returned to Antioch. From there he travelled into Asia in the regions of Galatia strengthening the disciples. Paul then returned to the Ephesus where he spent two years.

Paul started preaching in the synagogue but after the usual opposition, moved to another location speaking only to Gentiles. Signs and wonders were performed by Paul. Many were freed from demonic powers. It was here that Paul had his run in with the silversmiths. A consequence of people converting to Christianity was that they stopped buying the trinkets from the silversmiths and this dramatically impacted on their business. There were riots and Paul’s life was threatened. Eventually the city clerk calmed things down and Paul had to leave and he set out for Macedonia.

While serving the church in Ephesus Paul wrote a very direct letter to the church at Corinth. The church had splintered into factions over how to deal with the issues confronting the church.

The next letter that Paul wrote was to the church at Galatia. In that letter Paul addressed Jewish legalism. Judaisers were coming in and wanting the Christians to lose their freedom and become entangled again in a yoke of legal slavery.

In spite of a real desire, Paul never visited Rome. But he did write them a gem of a letter which mapped out the fundamental truths of the Christian faith. In this letter Paul makes his famous statement “I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe.” Another of his famous statements is this: “and we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him who have been called according to his purposes.”

Paul turned his sights back towards Jerusalem. He felt compelled to return there even though he also knew that hardship awaited him.

1. After Paul found the Lord, what was Paul's passion and mission in life?

Paul wanted to tell people about the Lord. Specifically he wanted to tell the Jews about the Lord. It was with apparent reluctance that he switched his focus to the Gentiles. But he just had to tell people about the Lord. As he said in **Rom 1:14**: "I am obligated to Greeks and non-Greeks, to the wise and the foolish ... that is why I am eager to preach the Gospel ..." Telling the Gospel story was Paul's passion and mission in life.

2. What is your passion and mission in life?

We might like to think of Paul as a so called "full time" missionary. But he wasn't. He had a trade which was accepted every where and he could earn a living wherever he went. He was a tent maker. So we cannot really say that "if only we were full time like Paul, things would be different..." and use that as an "excuse" that we are not as passionate as Paul was! He had to earn a living, and he was passionate, and he gave his time to telling people about Jesus' love.

But Paul was single. That made a huge difference, and he recognised that singleness can be an advantage, in some cases, when working for the Lord.

This meant that Paul had different time constraints on him being able to give expression to his passion. So I also want us to examine our passion objectively, and not suggest that we would do more if we were like Paul – for example.

What is our passion and mission in life? I think that we could CHOOSE to make sharing the Gospel our mission and passion – as Paul did. He felt a sense of obligation. We have no less obligation because we have been no less saved from eternal separation from God than Paul was. We therefore want to tell others – feel obligated to tell others – in response to what we have experienced in our salvation.

What will that look like? It may not mean that things in our lives look that different. But it will mean that when we go to work, to sport, to reading club, to the shop – that we do those things with a sense of intentionality. We would be eager to make use of opportunities to show kindness, to allow Jesus to love a person through us, to talk to someone if we had the opportunity. We may not get more opportunity, although I am sure that if we were intentional we would find ourselves with more opportunities. But our passion would be seen in that we were going through our days intentional about incarnating Jesus to whoever we are with.

3. When in a new city, why did Paul invariably begin his outreach at the Jewish synagogue?

The Gospel was always going to be to the Jews first. Paul acknowledged that and so did Jesus. So that was one reason he started with the synagogue.

But, it was a natural place to meet. The worshippers were there, and Paul used that as an opportunity to point to Jesus, the fulfilment of the OT longing of the Jews.

4. How would you define "the Gospel"?

Rom 1:16,17 is a good place to start:

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

The human problem is sin and separation from God. Sinful human beings cannot "stand" before a holy God. And we are powerless to do anything about it. So from our text, which we use to define the Gospel, the Gospel:

- It is the *power* of God – in the face of our powerlessness
- It is for our salvation

- It is required of us that we believe
- It is about “righteousness from God.” Righteousness in the instance means literally: a right standing, an ability to be in a right relationship with, God. The gospel is about God taking the initiative and revealing how we can enter into a right standing, or, a right relationship, with himself.
- Because we are powerless to do anything about it, it has to be by faith. We have to believe God, that he has made a way through Jesus for us to have this righteousness – this right standing with a holy God

Chapters 2-7 elaborate on this basic definition.

5. What impact does the Gospel have on your life?

The first question should be: DOES the Gospel have an impact on our lives? If the answer is YES, then we can explore what that impact is.

It should cause us to live responsively – i.e., to live in response to all He has done for us. This means obeying him – keeping the law – NOT in order to be saved, but because we are already saved. And what that looks like specifically will vary from person to person.

6. What would have happened to Christianity if the Jewish believers who insisted that Gentiles become Jews prevailed?

We would have ended up with people trying to work in order to be saved. We would have ended up with a set of “do this” and “don’t do that.”

What is interesting is this: Looking from the outside at a person living legalistically, and a person living in response to Christ’s love – it would look the same. Both would be living obediently. The difference would be this: One is living obediently IN ORDER TO EARN FAVOUR. The other would be living obediently IN RESPONSE TO THE FAVOUR THEY HAVE ALREADY BEEN SHOWN.

7. What does Paul’s letter to the Romans reveal about salvation?

It cannot be accomplished on our own – whether we are godless pagans – Rom 1:18ff; whether we are well intentioned Gentiles – Rom 2; whether we are law abiding –or otherwise – Jews – Rom 3. None of us can earn salvation.

The second major thing is this: those who are saved live differently – Rom 12-16.