

“The Message of This Salvation” (Acts 12:25-13:52)

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Acts 13:1-3 (ESV)

¹ Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” ³ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.¹

There are two types of people in this world: Those who can extrapolate from incomplete data.

Let me try again: There are three types of people in this world: Those who can count and those who can't

Seriously, so often, there do seem to be two types of people in this world. This is particularly true when it comes to discussing the most divisive issues. People tend to have very polarized opinions on political views, because public policy deals with important ethical issues. People have different views on religion: One group of people can view religion as comforting while another group can view religion as oppressive. People have different views on the “below the belt” issues of sex and abortion. One group of people can view what is happening in our country with regards to issues of sexuality and gender as liberating while another group of people can view recent trends as proof that the country is sliding quickly into the moral abyss.

For example, the other day the U.S. Department of Education issued a letter to all school districts in the country that says, in part, “When a school provides sex-segregated activities and facilities, transgender students must be allowed to participate in such activities and access such facilities consistent with their gender identity.”² On Facebook, I saw two types of reactions. One reaction was to cheer this on as progress. Another reaction was to decry this event as a perfect example of the brokenness of our government and the moral depravity of our nation.

Why is there such a division? Why do people line up on these issues in predictable ways? Why are there so many people who fit neatly into the “liberal” or “conservative” camps?

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

² Gregory Korte, “Q&A: What Does the Department of Education Say about Transgender Bathrooms?,” USA Today, May 13, 2016, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2016/05/13/what-does-department-of-education-say-about-transgender-bathrooms/84323146/> (accessed May 14, 2016).

I think the answer is because we have different worldviews, and there tend to be a few prominent ways of making sense of the world.

A worldview is a way of interpreting reality. It's a way of making sense of the world, of answering the basic questions that many people have asked throughout the ages, like "Who am I?" and "Why am I here?" A worldview usually consists of beliefs about God, the origins of the universe and human beings, what is right and what is wrong, the purpose of life, and so forth.

One Christian writer, James Sire, gives us a pretty technical definition of worldview. I'll read it and then explain it, so hang with me if you don't understand it all at first:

A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story of in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) that we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.³

That may be about as clear as mud to you, so let me interpret what he wrote. He's saying that how we make sense of the world, what we think life is all about, starts with our hearts. What we desire the most often determines how we make sense of the world. And we often make sense of the world by assuming certain things which may or may not be true. The things we hold to be true might even be in conflict with each other. An atheist may believe, at the same time, that, on the one hand, there's no creator God and that we are the products of chance and blind evolutionary forces; but, on the other hand, the same person may believe that our lives matter and that every life is precious and that we have rights simply because we're humans. He might believe those ideas, which don't really cohere, because, on the one hand, he wants his life to have meaning; but, on the other hand, he doesn't want there to be a God to whom he is accountable. The atheist philosopher Thomas Nagel once wrote, "I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that."⁴

³ James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 5th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 20.

⁴ Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 130, quoted in Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 143.

If I were to divide the world into two types of people, besides the obvious “there are those who are united to Christ and those who are not,” I would say this: There are those who believe in a God who created the world and those who do not. Those who believe that God created the world believe he designed us in a certain way that shouldn’t be changed. They believe that we are therefore finite and limited. They believe that in order to know this God, and to know the purpose of life, God needs to reveal these things. (That which isn’t revealed would remain hidden from us.) They believe that we will all be held accountable to God for everything we’ve done in our lives. Those who don’t believe in a God who created the universe and everything in it believe that “Man is the measure of all things,” as the Greek philosopher Protagoras once said. They believe that we can determine our own reality, that we can determine right and wrong. They believe that we can be our own lords. They do not believe in a future and final judgment day.

The first group of people, the ones who believe in a Creator God, are likely to believe in some kind of Scripture. They believe that God has revealed himself in his word. That’s certainly what Christians believe. We believe that in the Bible God has revealed what he is like, what he has done and is doing and will do in history, what he created us for, how to have a relationship with him, and what he expects of his people. We believe we would not know these things if he had not revealed them to us. We believe that we can speculate all we want, but if God didn’t tell us who he is and what is most important in life, we would simply be in the dark, making wild guesses.

I think that takes a certain humility. And I think the idea that we are limited, and can only have certain things revealed to us, is offensive to other people. But that is at the heart of Christianity. We believe that the Bible is God’s word, and that how people respond to the Bible is related to how they respond to God.

I take time to point this out because I think it explains so much of what we see in America today, particularly with regard to the most controversial issues related to sexuality, gender, and the sanctity of human life. But I also point this out because in today’s passage from the book of Acts, we’re going to see two kinds of people. There are people who hear the word of God and those who don’t. When I mean “hear,” I don’t mean those who have some type of auditory sensation. Those who hear are those who trust God’s word, those who take it as truth and respond to it rightly.

As we go through this passage, notice that there are six references to the “word of God” (13:4, 7, 46) or “the word of the Lord” (13:44, 48, 49). There are also many references to the prophets and what is written in Scripture (13:15, 27, 29, 33, 40; there are also other citations of Scripture in the passage). Here’s a Bible-reading tip: When you see repeated words and themes in a passage of Scripture, that’s usually related to the author’s main point.

Now, let’s begin. I’ll start with the last verse of chapter 12. We’re told that Barnabas and Saul had finished their ministry to Jerusalem. At the end of chapter 11, they delivered a financial gift from Christians in Antioch to Christians in Judea, because a prophet named Agabus had foretold that a famine was going to effect that region.

We haven’t spent time with Saul, or Paul, in a couple of weeks. Luke, the author of Acts, has been focusing on Peter. From now on, the book of Acts focuses on Paul and his missionary work.

Let’s read Acts 12:25 through 13:3.

²⁵ And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark.

¹ Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” ³ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

At the church in Antioch, there were some prophets and teachers, and the Holy Spirit tells them that he had called Barnabas and Saul to go on a special mission. These teachers lay hands on these men, setting them apart for this special task. Here, we see the Spirit, the third person of God, taking the initiative.

We don’t know much about the men mentioned here, but they seem to be representative of the church in Antioch, which was quite diverse because it had Jews and Gentiles and people from different nations. It was there that believers in Jesus were first called Christians (Acts 11:26). Simeon must have been a black man because “Niger” is Latin for black. Lucius was from Cyrene, in north Africa. And what’s really interesting is that there was a man named Manaen, who was “a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch.” The Greek word behind “lifelong friend”

means “to be brought up with.”⁵ It seems that Manaen was brought up in the same house, or at least was a friend of, Herod Antipas. This isn’t the Herod who died in Acts 12. This is the Herod who had John the Baptist beheaded, the one who divorced his wife to marry his brother’s wife, the one who mocked Jesus at his trial. This is a perfect example of what I was talking about earlier: Here are two men who grew up in the same environment. One seems to be an evil ruler, while the other becomes a Christian. They responded to the word of God in different ways.

After Barnabas and Saul, along with John Mark, leave Antioch, they travel to the island of Cyprus, which is in the Mediterranean. During the rest of this sermon series, it will be helpful to have a Bible that has maps, because Bibles that have maps usually have ones devoted to Paul’s missionary journeys. First, these three men arrive in the city of Salamis, on the eastern portion of the island. Then, they pass through the island to the city of Paphos, on the western end. Let’s read about what happened in verses 4-12:

⁴ So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. ⁵ When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them. ⁶ When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus. ⁷ He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. ⁸ But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. ⁹ But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him ¹⁰ and said, “You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? ¹¹ And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time.” Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. ¹² Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

When Barnabas and Saul arrive in Salamis, they first proclaim “the word of God” in the synagogues there. This makes sense. These two men were Jewish, and synagogues are where the Hebrew Bible was read and taught. It made perfect sense to go to this place to tell them that the one to whom the Old Testament pointed, Jesus, had come. Paul also expresses in Romans that the gospel of Jesus, the good news of who he is and what he’s done, was supposed to be proclaimed first to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles (Rom. 1:16). That’s because the Gospel

⁵ σύντροφος.

came from the Jews. It was the fulfillment of their faith. But it was always God's plan for this message to be proclaimed to non-Jewish people, too.

We're not told what happened in Salamis, but in Paphos, on the other side of the island, they encounter a man named Bar-Jesus, or Elymas. Luke says that this man was a magician and a false prophet. That means he was performing counterfeit miracles and speaking false words about God. We're told that he was with a proconsul, the Roman governor of the island, named Sergius Paulus. This man wants to hear Barnabas and Saul's message. Perhaps he thought Paul and Barnabas were traveling philosophers, who had come with the latest idea. It seems that Luke wants to make a point that people of power and intelligence were interested in Christianity. Though Sergius Paulus wants to hear the gospel, Elymas doesn't. He tries to keep the proconsul from hearing and believing the message. Elymas might have had some kind of official position under the proconsul. If the proconsul believed the gospel, Elymas would probably lose his job, because it would be clear his message was false while the gospel was true.

But Paul, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, rebukes Elymas. He says he is making the straight paths of the Lord crooked. John the Baptist, a true prophet, told people that when Jesus arrived, the crooked paths would be made straight (Luke 3:5). But this false prophet was doing the opposite. He was twisting the truth, trying to keep people from Jesus. Paul calls this man the son of the devil. The man is called Bar-Jesus, which literally means "son of Jesus" or "son of Yeshua (Joshua)." That doesn't mean Jesus the Christ, since there were many people named Jesus. But what Paul tells us is that this man isn't a son of Jesus, or a son of God. No, he's a son of the devil. There really are only two kinds of people in this world: Those who are children of God, and those who are children of the devil. That's what the apostle John writes in his first letter:

⁸ Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. ⁹ No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. ¹⁰ By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

That may seem harsh, but if we're not with God, we're against him. If we do not hold to the truth, we're being controlled by lies. Paul is confronted by a man who believed lies and whose message was lies. This man tries to stop the truth from prevailing. So Paul rebukes him, and

Elymas is blinded for a while. Paul, too, was blinded temporarily when he encountered Jesus (Acts 9:8-9), but the two men had very different fates.

We're also told that the proconsul comes to faith. He sees a miracle of judgment, the blinding of Elymas. But what amazes him is Paul's teaching. This is the teaching of the Lord. It isn't a message that Paul made up. It is a message Paul received and passed on to others (see 1 Cor. 15:3-9). The gospel continues to amaze those who are God's children.

After that episode, Paul and Barnabas leave the island of Cyprus and sail north. They arrive in Perga, a city in a region called Pamphylia. This is on the southern coast of what is now Turkey. When they get there, Mark leaves. We're not told why, but later we will find out that Paul thought Mark's leaving was an act of desertion (Acts 15:37-40). From Perga, Paul and Barnabas go to another Antioch, known as Psidian Antioch. Some scholars think they went to that particular city because Sergius Paulus had connections there and sent them in that direction. When the men arrive in Antioch, they go once again to a synagogue and Paul is given the opportunity to speak. At the synagogue were Jews, of course, but also Gentiles who feared God, who recognized that the one true God is the God of Israel, but who hadn't completely converted to Judaism, which would require circumcision of the men.

Since Paul's speech is similar to what we've already heard in Acts, I'm not going to analyze it bit by bit. Instead, I'll read all of it and then explain the main points. So let's read verses 13-43:

¹³ Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem, ¹⁴ but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. ¹⁵ After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it." ¹⁶ So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said:

"Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen. ¹⁷ The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. ¹⁸ And for about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness. ¹⁹ And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance. ²⁰ All this took about 450 years. And after that he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. ²¹ Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. ²² And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, 'I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.' ²³ Of this man's offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised. ²⁴ Before his coming,

John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. ²⁵ And as John was finishing his course, he said, ‘What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but behold, after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.’

²⁶“Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. ²⁷ For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him. ²⁸ And though they found in him no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed. ²⁹ And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. ³⁰ But God raised him from the dead, ³¹ and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people. ³² And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, ³³ this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm,

“‘You are my Son,
today I have begotten you.’

³⁴ And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way,

“‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.’

³⁵ Therefore he says also in another psalm,

“‘You will not let your Holy One see corruption.’

³⁶ For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption, ³⁷ but he whom God raised up did not see corruption. ³⁸ Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, ³⁹ and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. ⁴⁰ Beware, therefore, lest what is said in the Prophets should come about:

⁴¹ “‘Look, you scoffers,
be astounded and perish;
for I am doing a work in your days,
a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you.’”

⁴² As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. ⁴³ And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.

This is Paul's longest speech in the book of Acts. And he does something similar to what Peter did in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost, and what Stephen did in Acts 7 when he recalled the history of Israel. Yet Paul's message isn't structured in as clear of a way. In Acts 2, Peter tells the people that the coming of the Holy Spirit fulfilled prophecy, and that Jesus was the true Son of David, the Messiah, who died and rose from the grave. In Acts 7, Stephen tells the history of Israel and points out how God had a habit of raising up leaders full of wisdom whom the people of Israel rejected.

In Paul's speech, he focuses on a few main events in Israel's history: First, he points out that God chose the patriarchs. God chose Abraham, the father of the Israelites. Abraham wasn't searching for God, but God chose Abraham. And God blessed his descendants and they ended up in Egypt, which happened during the Joseph story (Gen. 37-50). In Egypt, a large family of Israelites grew over a four hundred year period to become a great nation. Second, Paul says that God led the Israelites out of Egypt. They were slaves in that land, but God delivered them. Third, they wandered through the wilderness, where God took care of them and "put up with them" for forty years. Fourth, then God led them into the Promised Land of Canaan, destroying their enemies. And fifth, God gave Israel a king. The first king was Saul, but the great king was his successor, a man after God's heart, David.

All this history points to the Son of David, Jesus. He is the promised Savior of Israel. The message of Jesus is "the message of this salvation." But though Jesus is the Messiah, the one who all the Old Testament foreshadowed, the Jewish leaders didn't realize this. Paul says that "they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath" (v. 27). These Jewish leaders knew the content of the Hebrew Bible better than anyone, yet they didn't understand what that content meant. When God in the flesh stood among them, they didn't know it. They condemned Jesus, an innocent man. And all of this fulfilled the Scriptures that they supposedly knew so well.

Though they killed Jesus, God raised him up from the dead. Jesus' death showed to the world that he is the Son of God. He is the King who reigns. He is the true offspring of David, the one who lives forever and rules forever and who brings blessings to all who turn to him. He is the one who brings forgiveness of sins. He is the one who frees us from the law of the Old Testament, which no one could fulfill but Jesus. He is the one who frees us from anything else that might hold us captive, all our addictions and selfishness and even the fear of death.

In verse 34, Paul quotes Isaiah 55:3. It's interesting to look at Isaiah 55:1-3:

- ¹ “Come, everyone who thirsts,
 come to the waters;
and he who has no money,
 come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
 without money and without price.
- ² Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
 and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,
 and delight yourselves in rich food.
- ³ Incline your ear, and come to me;
 hear, that your soul may live;
and I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
 my steadfast, sure love for David.

We're told to come and eat and drink spiritual food which satisfies. That means that Jesus provides real life. The things of this world don't satisfy our souls the way that Jesus can. And we're told to buy this spiritual food with no money and price. How can you buy something without money that doesn't cost you anything? We all know there's no such thing as a free lunch. The only way we can "buy" something for free is if someone else paid for it. Imagine we went shopping at Market Basket, we loaded up a cart full of groceries, then we got to the checkout. The cashier rang up all our groceries and said, "Thanks for buying this food, it doesn't cost you anything." The only way that would make sense is if someone else paid the bill. And that's what Jesus did. His death on the cross paid the penalty for our wrongdoing. He paid our debt to God when he died for us.

I think Paul's speech is structured so it points out that Jesus fulfilled the history of Israel. First, Jesus was God's chosen one, because he was the one and only Son of God. Second, after Jesus was born, he went to Egypt, fleeing from Herod the Great, and he came out of Egypt and into Israel. Third, Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by Satan but he didn't sin. Jesus never sinned. Fourth, after Jesus died, he rose from the grave and ascended into heaven. This is, in a way, his entry into the Promised Land. His death and resurrection defeated his enemies. And, fifth, Jesus is the exalted king.

And that's the pattern set for God's people. First, God chose his people, even before the foundation of the world. We're about to read that God has appointed certain people to eternal life. Second, God rescues his people, not out of literal slavery, but out of slavery to sin. He

redeems us on the basis of Jesus' sacrificial death. Third, we wander through the wilderness of this life, being tempted and trusting for God to provide for our needs. Fourth, when Jesus returns, he will destroy his enemies and turn the whole world into a Promised Land, a perfect place where only God and his people dwell. And, finally, we will exalted with Christ. We will have resurrected bodies. We will reign with him forever.

I think that's why Paul frames his speech that way. But Paul also delivers a warning. Paul quotes a verse from Habakkuk in verse 41. Just as the Jews in the prophet Habakkuk's day would be astounded by how God would use Babylon to judge the wicked and idolatrous Jews roughly 600 years before Christ, God will judge those who continue to resist him, his word, and his messengers.

At the end of that long passage, we find that there are people who beg Paul and Barnabas to come back the following week. There were people who were hungry for God's word. But not everyone was so hungry.

Let's read the conclusion of this chapter. Here are verses 44-52:

⁴⁴ The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. ⁴⁵ But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. ⁴⁶ And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷ For so the Lord has commanded us, saying,

"I have made you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."

⁴⁸ And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. ⁴⁹ And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. ⁵⁰ But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. ⁵¹ But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. ⁵² And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

A large crowd gathered on the next Saturday. They came "to hear the word of the Lord." It seems word got around that Paul had a unique message, a message of freedom. But there were Jews who were jealous. They were probably the leaders of the synagogue. Perhaps they were jealous because Paul was getting more attention than them, and he was more successful at

reaching Gentiles. Paul rebukes these men, just as he rebuked Elymas. He says that he will now go to the Gentiles. And he quotes Isaiah 49:6, which said that Israel would become a light to Gentiles, bringing salvation to the ends of the earth. This was God's plan all along.

As we'll find out, Paul will keep coming back to the synagogues. He never gave up on his fellow Jews. But he realized that many of them had rejected the gospel.

Once again, we see that some believe this message and rejoice, while others are opposed and try to persecute Paula and Barnabas. Everyone whom God had appointed to life came to faith. That's how that works. God brings the gospel to those he chooses, and they believe it. The believers rejoiced and they glorified the word of God. People who come to believe in the gospel of Jesus have a high regard for Scripture. We don't worship the Bible, but we rejoice in it, because it is God's word to us. The gospel should bring joy, because it is good news. But to those who don't believe, it is a message of foolishness and an object of their contempt. This is nothing new.

As we finish, I want us to consider what words we believe. What message brings you joy? What message is brings you hope? What news do you trust? All of us are shaped by messages and all of us share messages. What is your message?

If you're not a Christian, I urge you to think about this message. Jesus can free you from everything that the stuff of this world cannot free you from. We're told by the world that if you follow your heart, you'll find freedom. Just give in to your desires and you'll be free. That's wrong. And I'm afraid that many people will learn that truth the hard way.

I realize that some people view the Bible not as God's word, but as an antiquated book full of out-of-date ideas. Well, consider this: There are things in the Bible that challenge and confront and offend people of all ages and from all places. We would expect that if a holy God addressed flawed and erring people, his word would confront them and correct them. That's what we find in the Bible. And consider this: We can look back in history 50, 100, or 200 years and see that people believed and did foolish things. We say, "I can't believe they did that! I can't believe they believed that!" Guess what people are going to say of us in 50, 100, or 200 years? They'll say the same thing. If we want to be never out-of-date, we need to have an eternal and unchanging word from God.

If you're a Christian, I urge you to cling to this message. Continue in the grace of God. Continue reading his word. Do what it says. And share it with others. Yes, there will be those

who revile you. There will be people who try to shut you up. There will be people who mock you. But to those who were appointed to eternal life, the gospel will lead to faith and joy and salvation.