

## Intro (Intro and Background 13 minutes)

What does a word of encouragement look like for you? Let that question just sit for a moment and think it through. If it helps, you can think through some scenarios of when you've provided encouraging words to close friends or relatives, and maybe even received encouraging words from those friends or relatives. Were the words appropriate for the occasion? Or did the words miss the mark and possibly tear the person down further? Was the Gospel evident in what was shared? Or did the exhortation sound kind of flimsy and cliché? We've all been through the scenarios where we just have no idea what to say in those times of grief, those times of sorrow, those challenging times where there isn't a simple or obvious answer to the problem that is staring you down waiting, just waiting for a response. And those can be the times when we find ourselves feeling pressured to speak. And, sometimes, we speak out of turn in those high pressure moments, right? We think, "Aw! Did I *just* say that?" or "Welp! That wasn't helpful at all!" When we consider a grid to use for encouragement or exhortation, scripture should be our guide. One specific verse that I've found helpful as of late is Hebrews chapter 3 verse 13 where the author tells us:

"But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

Do hear the massive, driving purpose behind our encouragement in that verse? It's at the very end where the author of Hebrews says, "so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of of sin." The words that a grieving parent needs to hear from a trusted friend are vastly different than the words that a child experiencing failure needs to hear from a loving parent. However, that grieving parent and that saddened child do have at least one thing in common: they are likely both being deceived to believe a lie.

A lie that the burdens of this world are too great to cast onto God. A lie that there isn't a Father that cares for them. A lie that there isn't a Savior that has gone through every fiery earthly trial, and far more cosmic ones, so that we can turn to one stronger than us and lay our burdens down at the foot of the cross. A lie that we haven't received the Spirit in our lives to help us in these times of distress. To accurately apply the teachings of our faith, to save us everyday, as we need saving from our sinful selves everyday. This is where turning to the Gospel to encourage, to exhort one another is critical for the perseverance of the saints.

So let's return to our question: What does a word of encouragement look like for you?

Well it just so happens we see Paul doing this very thing, encouraging the fainthearted, in Acts 13. You're probably thinking, but wait! It looks like he's preaching a sermon. Yes he is, but he's preaching probably one of his far more challenging sermons. You see, Paul cares deeply about these lost souls in front of him, so much so that he's willing to make some controversial statements so that the Lord could maybe, but just maybe, open the eyes of the blind, have them confess, repent anew, and follow Jesus. Paul is exhorting! And his exhortation is being led totally, and unequivocally by the Holy Spirit. So if you have your Bibles open to the Book of Acts keep your finger in chapter 13 as we'll be jumping into verse 15 momentarily. First, let's pray, and then we can dive in.

## Text

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.

## Background

Alright, so this morning we'll be getting into the book of Acts. Now if you're new to the Bible or if you just need a short refresher on the book of Acts, well, then good! Because that's what we're going to do. A short refresher. And when I say a short, I truly mean that.

So, the book of Acts.

A few things are important with context setting before we jump in: they are timeline, setting, and purpose.

So, timeline. Acts starts at the ascension of Jesus. So the summary here is: Jesus has come to Earth, he has gone through his whole earthly ministry, he was crucified and buried, as we know, spoiler alert, he is risen, and now he has ascended into heaven. All four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all have accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus. So if you want more details on the previous big events I just mentioned, feel free to dive into any one of those books or, even better, feel free to join us any given Sunday as we continue to work our way through the book of Luke as a church.

But back to Acts. Before Jesus fully ascends to be with the Father he charges the apostles, the eleven disciples, not twelve since Judas is removed from the equation, he charges the apostles with the great commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." So these eleven men now have their charge: take the word of God to all the nations, or as Luke writes in Acts 1:8: "...be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." And so begins the book of Acts.

The last two context setting pieces of setting and purpose we can lump together, mainly because I've already slightly alluded to them. Location wise, the book of Acts starts in Jerusalem and propagates out to all parts of modern day Greece, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and, ultimately, Rome. So we're talking about a pretty large swath of territory. That's location. Finally purpose. Why were the apostles covering so much ground? What was their purpose? Well it was to be a witness to the world for the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. To share the good news about eternal life. God chose these eleven men, and eventually a new twelfth apostle, to tell people about the need for a Savior. And as souls were saved, the natural byproduct was to plant Christ-believing churches across each of these regions.

The book is effectively all about the early church, and part of its purpose is to show us, the readers, how and where the Gospel spread. As we zoom in on the details of the book, we begin to see that the majority of Acts deals primarily with two apostles, Peter and Paul, and it gives special airtime to the sermons that both of them delivered during the early days of the church. And this is where our text takes us today. To Paul's sermon at Antioch in Pisidia, which, for those geography nerds out there, Pisidia is in the Western part of modern day Turkey near a city called Isparta. If that means something to you, great, I've done my job here this morning.

One last piece of background: Paul. Paul, was Saul. He was raised a devout Jew, he was extremely well educated, and before his conversion he was a persecutor of Christians. One day God gets a hold of his life by literally blinding him, speaking to him, and returning his sight after a period of time. It's at this point that Saul is known as Paul. There's obviously a lot more that we could say about Paul, and if you're interested in reading more you can flip to Acts chapters 7, 8, 9, and 22. You'll see that almost all the essential background info on Paul is packed in this very book that we're in today, so feel free to peruse sometime today or later this week.

And just as a side note, we will *not* exegete this text line by line today. Although it is so rich with so many connections back to Old Testament prophecies, promises, and truths, we just don't have time to dive in that deep today. Now I know that some of you may be holding back a huge sigh of relief, which is cool, I get it. But don't worry, we will still expound on a few key verses, just not all 24 ish verses. Anyway, the approach this morning is to look at this text in three big chunks:

Verses 15 through 25 which I've titled **The Coming of Christ**.

Verses 26 through 37 where we see **God's ultimate provision in Christ**.

And finally Verses 38 and 39 where we are **Invited into Communion with Christ**.

Though many of these verses speak for themselves, my prayer is we all walk away with a clearer picture of how they apply to our lives.

## Point 1 - The Coming of Christ (v 15-25) (15 minutes)

A sketch of Old Testament history

Okay, let's look at verses 15 through 25 with the Coming Christ. It starts with these synagogue rulers reading the word of God. And what did they read? Verse 15 tells us that they read scripture concerning the "Law and Prophets." For those of you that are unfamiliar with these two categories of scripture, just think Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus when you hear the Law and Joshua, Judges, Kings, Jeremiah where you hear the Prophets. It probably goes without saying that New Testament texts did not exist in those days, so they didn't have any of the Gospels or Epistles to pull from. All they had was the Old Testament.

So these synagogue rulers read the text, and, as was customary in most any synagogue at that time, after the Word was read there would be a sermon, not too dissimilar to how the modern

day church is structured today. So these religious leaders just finished reading scripture, the Law and the Prophets mind you, they see Paul and his buddy Barnabas hanging out in the synagogue, and tell them at the end of verse 15 “if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it.” What’s interesting is these leaders ask Paul and Barnabas for an encouraging word from the texts that were read. Not an exegetical word, or a historical word, or a teaching of some sort, all of which were customary for that time. Nope, they ask for one of these two guys to give an *encouraging* word to the crowd. From the books of the Law and the Prophets no less!

Now, this is a bit of a tangent but totally related, if you’ve ever read through books of the Law like Numbers, Leviticus, or Deuteronomy, you know, you know! It’s not easy to provide an encouraging word, at least not without being able to point to something greater with our coming Savior. It’s just a bunch of rules of dos and do nots, ways that you can be kicked out of the city for being unclean, sacrifices that you have to provide to keep a good relationship with God. Rule after rule, commandment after commandment, all being kept imperfectly by an imperfect nation. And somehow, as part of the nation of Israel, convincing yourself that God has chosen this imperfect people, this motley crew of Jewish believers, to be with him for all of eternity. That’s the Law, but on top of that! To provide an encouraging word from any of the Prophets. Now look, don’t get me wrong. Isaiah is great, as is Jeremiah, and Ezekiel and Daniel. But have you ever read through any of the minor prophets? Joel, or Hosea, or Nahum. Read Nahum and come back to me with an encouraging word without being able to reference Jesus. Seriously, if you haven’t read Nahum before, read it. It’s in the Old Testament. Don’t read it now. Later. But log it away and read it later. It’s short, like three chapters, and the book is pretty straight forward: Nahum is a prophet that talks about the fall of Ninevah after God spared Ninevah in Jonah’s day. I’m sure there’s an encouraging word somewhere for the nation of Israel in a story like that, but it’s not leaping off the pages. That’s for sure! And yet, this is what Paul is up against. Without the Gospel, all you have are a bunch of laws from the Old Testament, promises sprinkled throughout scripture that don’t have an ultimate fulfillment yet in a Messiah, and Prophets talking about the rise and fall of nations with a Savior that will come...one day. So Paul, totally in tune with the Holy Spirit, is the one that responds to this invitation from the synagogue rulers by standing up in verse 16.

Now normally in that day, when one was teaching the law and expounding on the text, that person sat. So with Paul standing up, we immediately see that he does not intend to just expound on the text, but rather he motions that he is here to exhort. To encourage. To spur on the crowd in the synagogue. Paul always knew his audience well, and he knew in this instance that even the motion of standing sent a direct message into the hearts of all the hearers there: to be ready for good news.

Looking around the room, Paul sees two distinct groups of people in the congregation and addresses them both—“men of Israel” who were the Jewish people and “you who fear God” who were the Gentiles. If you’re wondering what these Gentiles are doing in a Jewish synagogue, well, you’re asking the right question. These particular Gentiles worshiped Israel’s God but had not fully submitted to the Jewish faith. However, because they followed two of the primary

expressions of the Jewish faith - prayer and gifts to the poor - they would be admitted into the synagogue on the Sabbath. At the end of the day, these Gentiles were unsure who the true God really was, but one thing's for certain: these Jewish folks seemed to believe pretty strongly in their God of Abraham.

So Paul sees these two groups of people and plunges straight into a survey of Jewish history. He does this super high level flyover of the Old Testament. In verse 17 he recalls the Jewish patriarchs, Israel's travels into Egypt, their 400 years in bondage in Egypt, and how Israel made their way out. In verses 18 and 19 he points to the forty years spent wandering in the desert and ten years of conquest where Israel ran out the seven nations in Canaan so they could claim their land. Then he moves on to the Judges in verse 20, and decides to put things into fifth gear so he leave that time period with the Judges and move on to Samuel. Seriously, things got pretty ugly for Israel during that time, so I don't fault him for not wanting to touch that era of time. After Samuel we see Paul slow things down in verse 21 when he starts talking about Israel asking for a King. And if we're not careful here, we, here today, can miss the exact thing that many of the Gentiles likely missed in the synagogue that day. You see those last five verses of Paul's sermon weren't really designed for the Gentiles. They were designed for the Jews. Paul was strategically using words of encouragement and sovereignty as he summed up hundreds upon hundreds of years of Jewish history. Paul wanted to show, at the outset, that Israel was chosen by God, cared for by God, and commissioned by God. Here, let's look back at some of the verb choices Paul used in the previous verses:

Verse 17

- God **chose** the patriarchs, or in the original context, **elected** could be used here.
- God **made them great**, or it can also be read as **exalted** them; talking about Israel in Egypt
- God **led them out** of Egypt; talking about the Exodus

Verse 18

- God **put up with them**; this is referring to God's long suffering during the desert wanderings

Verse 19

- God **gave them their land as an inheritance**; God fulfilled his promise by giving Israel Canaan

Verse 20

- God **gave them judges**; God allowed Israel to install judges

Finally verse 21

- God **gave them a king**; God allowed Israel to have their King with Saul until He raised up a King in David

Do see how Paul's words are totally intentional? He is stressing God's mercy to Israel, God's acts of lovingkindness, his election of Israel, his exaltation of his people, his gift of an inheritance in the promised land, his gift of rulers and kings. Every step of the way, in the dark times of Egypt, in the dark times of the Judges, in the dark times of Saul, the God of Abraham,

the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, remembered a people. A people he was jealous for. A people he pursued. A people that he freed. A people that he wished to fully redeem and reconcile to him.

Now do you see what just happened here? Paul has just taken some of the toughest teachings of the Old Testament Law and encouraged those people in the congregation who are likely struggling with some element of the Jewish faith. There seems to be an underlying sense of weariness in the congregation, namely because the synagogue leaders chose not to teach on that Sabbath day and instead requested encouragement for their congregation. What everyone is weary from is open to interpretation. But safe it to say, with Paul focusing so much on salvation through faith alone as well God being a promise keeper, it would lead us to believe that these Jewish church goers, and possibly even the Gentiles attending the synagogue, are weary with keeping the Law because they don't see an end in sight and just want rest. Now how many people here today can relate with that? On the weariness front, I can tell you that I have a three year old daughter at home, just one, and I can relate with the idea of wanting physical rest. But what I'm getting at is more than that. It's true rest. It's eliminating the restlessness of your heart. And this is where the Gospel is always appropriate to share with that weary brother or sister.

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for you souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30

Or how about "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on Him, because he cares for you." 1 Peter 5:6-7

Both of these pieces of scripture beckon us to the throne of grace. They encourage us to forklift those worries off our shoulders and put them on the shoulders of the one who can bear them for us. So as we encourage the faint hearted, let's be sure we're leading with the Gospel with any words that flow from our mouths.

Okay, so back to our text. So Paul just flew through several hundred years of Jewish history in a matter of five verses and then throws on the brakes in the successive four verses with David and John the Baptist because this is the point Paul wants to stress.

First, we read in verse 22 that God "**raised up**" David. This verb "raised up" is a common Old Testament expression for God bringing forth a prophet or ruler to serve his people. So, not totally out of the ordinary for Paul to use such a term. But what's also interesting is "raised up" is the same expression used to describe Jesus' resurrection. Not only that, but reading on in verse 22, Paul says "I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, **who will do all my will.**" While David did all of God's will, he did it imperfectly. But in Jesus we see the perfect completion of doing all of the Father's will, even until death. Now this is where the curve ball

comes in for the congregation. Because so far they've been hearing a lot of encouragement from Paul about being the chosen race, being part of the elect, part of the promise, receiving an inheritance, and so on. I mean, Paul can stop here and go home as far as the Jews in the synagogue are concerned because they've received their encouraging word. But we all know that Paul wouldn't leave without preaching Christ crucified. And this is exactly what he does.

In Verse 23 Paul drops the controversial bombshell, that of David's "offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised." I'm sure you could cut the tension with a knife after Paul just said the word Jesus. What's difficult about this statement with Jesus being part of David's line is that that everyone in that synagogue knows that David received a special promise from God. And they know that the promised one was a descendant who would be God's own Son. And this Son would establish a kingdom that would last forever. So with Paul stating that the promised descendant of David was Jesus the Savior, many people probably began to get shifty in their seats. But this promise made to David was Paul's ultimate goal for the last eight verses. And if you think he's done, well, remember, we still have sixteen more verses to go! You better believe that Paul will go on to explain how Christ fulfilled the promise over the next several verses.

But then we hit this little transition in verses 24 and 25. There's a shift away from Old Testament promises and history, and we turn to the life of John the Baptist. And you've got to be thinking, hmm. Well that seems out of place. On the surface, that is absolutely true. But the very fact that John was placed between these two major sections of Paul's sermon shows that John is playing a transitional role. John was the messenger, the last in the line of Old Testament prophets, who heralded the coming of the Messiah. He was the link-figure, joining together the period of Israel and the period of God's new community in Christ. So it's actually critical for Paul to confirm that John himself was not the coming one. Rather, John was finishing his task when Jesus appeared and was content to take a humble role in relation to him. Even quoting John as saying, "...after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie." Paul knew that there were some people who honoured John too highly, and that it was necessary to remind them that John submitted to the Christ. And it's in making this case that Paul is able to move on to the next part of his sermon.

## Point 2 - God's Ultimate Provision in Christ (26-37) (9 minutes)

I know we spent a lot of time on point 1. Don't worry. Points two and three are shorter. But we had to spend the time understanding the subtlety of Paul's words in those first few verses, that, quite frankly, were not so subtle to the Jewish gatherers in the synagogue that day. So thanks for your patience.

So we covered **The Coming of Christ** in verses 15-25, and now we enter the second chunk of scripture, **God's Ultimate Provision in Christ** with verses 26-37.

So after dropping the bombshell about Jesus being the Messiah just seconds ago, Paul begins this next section with almost a reset for the Jewish believers. The message about the Saviour in verse 23 is directed to the Jews, and you can imagine that it captivated their attention. Paul knows that some of them are probably a little shaken by what he just said. I mean, he's effectively just told them that the Jewish law and prophecies have all been all fulfilled by a Messiah that they've never met. Never seen. Never even heard! Sounds a little hokey. I know if I were sitting in the congregation that day, I would want more proof that this all falls in line with the beliefs from my umpteen previous generations of forefathers. And, honestly, I would possibly even want some additional encouragement to understand what it means to believe in this Messiah. To know what is to become of my faith if everything has truly been fulfilled in Christ. "What now?" Is the big question that comes to mind. Is the Law still relevant? What Jewish teachings do I submit to? Paul senses this and starts with another step of exhortation in verse 26: "Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham." Stop there.

I know some of you are laughing to yourselves because I said I wouldn't go line by line. And yet, here we are.

Okay, seriously, Paul is doing two things here: he is calling the Jewish people in the synagogue his brothers. As a Jew himself, it's obvious that he literally means to call these people his Jewish brothers since they've been raised in the same faith. So literally, a like for like, as a Jew, they are brothers in this chosen race. But there is also an appeal here. Paul *desires* to call them his *brothers in Christ*. He is showing them that they can, if they so choose, be called a child of the living God. And he takes the encouragement a step further: Paul reaffirms the Jewish people's place in Israel's grand story. They are the children of Abraham. They are God's chosen people. Paul is so compassionate to begin verse 26 with this encouragement knowing that his brothers need be exhorted before being challenged. Because he also knows that what is about to follow in verses 27 and 28 could put some of them back on their heels.

In verse 27 Paul states that the Jewish people of Jerusalem, and especially their rulers, did not recognize Jesus as their God-sent Messiah. And he explains that what was done to Jesus was done in ignorance. That, apparently, the Jews of Jerusalem failed to recognize and appreciate the significance of the prophetic words of the Old Testament. And yet, in condemning Jesus to death, they unknowingly fulfilled the exact prophecies that the Messiah must suffer and die. The irony of it all was that the Jews were the very ones who *should have* understood who Jesus was because they read those very prophecies in their synagogues every Sabbath and multiple days throughout the week. That has to be one of the most profound parts of Paul's whole sermon. That the Jews heard the truth of the word over and over by people of authority, they even lived out their faith daily, but ultimately the truth was not in them. They were left blind to the truth about this Jesus that the Law and the Prophets pointed to for centuries.

So how does Paul stay true to the truth of history while continuing to exhort this group of Jewish people? Paul emphasizes how the Jews contributed to the divine plan of all that had been prophesied concerning the death of Jesus. He's even going as far as to show them the critical

role that the Jews played in condemning Jesus and, without them, we would not have a Messiah that fulfilled every prophecy. Wait, what? How on earth can someone, anyone take such an odd perspective on such a tragic event for what was done to the Almighty? Casting guilt on the the innocent, killing the One that never deserved to die. How incredible is our heavenly Father that there is forgiveness for even the gravest of sins.

Then Paul goes on to show the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies that these Jewish people would have been familiar with. We'll do another flyover of these next verses.

Verse 29: Jesus was nailed to a tree and laid in a tomb fulfills Psalm 22 verses 16 and 17

**“For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hand and my feet - I can count all my bones - they stare and gloat over me’**

Along with Deuteronomy 21 verses 22 and 23 and likely others.

Verse 30: “God raised him from the dead” fulfills Hosea 6:2

**“After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live before him’**

Verse 31: “and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee” fulfills Job 19 verses 25 - 27

**“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.”**

And just so you know, this is only scratching the surface of the Old Testament prophecies that Jesus fulfilled, and he did indeed fulfill all of them. Each and every one.

And so why emphasize these specific prophecies? Paul could have chosen any number of prophecies to mention in his sermon. Why these ones? Well, Paul doesn't leave us or the Jews in the synagogue guessing. He comes right out and says it in verses 32 and 33:

“And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus...”

Paul emphasized the entire Christ event, the journey from Galilee all the way to the witness of the crucifixion, the whole forty-day period of Jesus' resurrection and even showing that the Twelve apostles could attest to these events. And why? Because Paul is imploring them. Please, please understand. The same way that David was raised up by God to be king over a nation for a temporary period of time, that this Jesus was raised from the dead by God to be made King for all of time. To be our King! It is by the resurrection of Jesus that God demonstrates he truly accomplishes his promise by bringing forth his Son. Everything these Jewish people have been waiting for and eagerly anticipating has now been completed with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen?!

Paul's role is that of an evangelist, one who brings the good news to the Jews and the Gentiles. And all throughout these verses Paul amplifies the message that the promises God made to their Jewish ancestors have now been fulfilled by God through raising Jesus from the dead. And so, Paul implores this group of Jewish people: don't throw away your opportunity of eternal salvation. Don't. Take up your cross and follow Jesus. Paul used scripture over and over to attest to the resurrection of Jesus as one who fulfilled the promises to David. Now what remained was for his hearers to accept this Jesus as the promised Savior.

Finally, there's a couple of old testament texts in this section that we won't have time to fully address. They're in verse 34 that says "I will give to you the holy and sure blessings promised to David" and verse 35 that says "You will not let your Holy One see corruption." In short, the holy and sure blessing in verse 34 are God's promise that he would establish an eternal throne, a kingdom that would last forever. But we know that God's promise was not fulfilled in David, who did not himself enjoy an eternal reign, it was fulfilled in Jesus.

The other Old Testament text in verse 35 refers to God's Holy One who will not suffer decay. We know that David was not speaking about himself in the psalm because he died, was buried, and his body decayed. Jesus escaped death and decay by being raised from the dead.

### Point 3 - Invited into Communion with Christ (38, 39) (5 minutes)

So we hit **The Coming of Christ**, we just finished **God's Ultimate Provision in Christ**, and now we jump into the last point, how we are **Invited into Communion with Christ**, verses 38 and 39.

With the third address to his Jewish "brothers" in the synagogue in verse 38, Paul turned to the final and most important part of his sermon - the call to repentance. Throughout the sermon Paul has bolded God's constant acts of mercy for the nation of Israel. Now he offers God's greatest act of mercy: the forgiveness of sins through Jesus. So you have to imagine that these Jews sitting in the synagogue are wondering: How can it be? How can it be that through one man, this Jesus, that our sins could be forgiven? And on top of that to hear Paul's next statement in verse 39:

"And by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses." What Paul is referring to here is justification. The law of Moses could never justify a person. Now that's not to say that Christ's justification is only for those things for which the law offered no remedy. Not at all! The point is that justification is not possible at all through the law. Above all, we should not miss the significance of 'every one that believes': this is an offer for Gentiles as well as for Jews. Meaning that all people in the synagogue that day could choose to be free from the bondage of sin and be fully justified in the eyes of God.

Paul would go on to write in the book of Romans that it was only by faith, and faith alone, that Abraham was justified. Scripture says that "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Romans 4:3. Abraham, the Father of many nations, was saved because of his faith in a holy God, Yahweh. Now works flowed out of Abraham *because* of his faith, but it was never his works that saved him nor did his works continue to save him. Abraham's name, along with many other Old Testament saints, have their names written in the Book of Life because of the faith they had in a Holy God.

Why does this matter? Because friends, perhaps, but just perhaps, the best source of encouragement we can give to our spouse, to our brother or sister in Christ, to our children, to our family members, to our coworkers, to anyone we come into contact with, is that they are a child of the living God. Think about that. Think about the impact of those words. You are a new creation in Christ, the old has passed away behold the new has come! This singular truth will help to dispel any lie or deceit from the Enemy, and bring the light of Christ into the centerfold where the darkness has no place. Now each circumstance will be different and we need to ask the Spirit for His help is choosing the rest of our words, but we should always offer our exhortation to another person by telling them who they are in the eyes of our heavenly Father. No matter the circumstances, no matter the depth of their suffering, no matter the dire straights of their weariness, no matter the hopelessness that they're confronting, God has you. He knows you by name, and He desires to draw near to you, especially in these trying times.

So how do the Jewish hearers respond that day after Paul's sermon? Well, if you read on just a bit you see in verse 42 that the people

"...begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. 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."

So you would expect there to be some changed hearts of these Jewish men. You would expect there we would have some new members that we would welcome into the family of God. Unfortunately, things don't end as you think they would. There's bad news here. You see, these Jewish people came to the synagogue every Sabbath. They sat under the authority of the word by some of the sharpest rabbis around. They prayed, they tithed, they observed all the Jewish traditions of the day. But when it came time to respond to the beautiful truth that all has been fulfilled for you, brother, they harden their hearts. Yes by the following Sabbath, after some reflection, those very same Jewish believers that were begging to have these same things told to them the next week, reject Paul's message. And Paul says in verse 46, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you [the Jewish people]. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. 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.'"

And what's the result? Verse 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."

While one group of people threw this free gift another group gladly accepted this new found truth with open arms and open hearts.

Brothers and sisters, we are not immune to the same blindness that plagues these non believers at Antioch of Pisidia, so remember:

"... exhort one another every day, as long as it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

## Conclusion (4 minutes)

So let's ask the question one more time: what does an encouraging word look like for you? How will God's word impact the words you choose the next time counsel flows from your mouth?

I'll just say one more thing and then close things up: This invitation, the one we learned about for those at the synagogue, the same invitation exists for all of us here today. If you don't know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, please know that we would love to talk to you more about that. We would encourage you to find someone around you to pray with and we would love to welcome you into the family of God. There's a song that we sing here at Mercy Hill on some Sundays, and the chorus goes:

Come to the altar, the Father's arms are opened wide.  
Forgiveness is bought with, the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

Church, be encouraged: there is hope in every trial, there is comfort in every struggle, there is light that breaks through the darkness, there is truth that shatters every lie. Come to the altar. Rejoice, because he is risen. Amen.