

**Telling the Story – The Big Picture**  
**Acts 13:13-42**

Well brothers and sisters – after having looked at some different kinds of spiritual thirst last month I’m wondering if you are noticing any spiritual thirst in your life and in the lives of the people who are around you?

I’m praying that the Holy Spirit has made you more aware of a desire to be forgiven, or needing some assurance that you are a good person... or being curious to experience the supernatural presence of God or wanting to receive healing...

Or you want to see justice, make the world a better place, or be accepted and loved unconditionally or be a better person... all these desires and many more can be used by the Holy Spirit to make us open to having Jesus Christ meet these needs and satisfy our spiritual thirst.

However if you are not noticing any spiritual thirst – there is no need to worry, we’ll just continue to pray that Holy Spirit will reveal it to you in due course.

In fact you may discover that part of the reason you may not be noticing anything right now is because there is some great need in your life at the moment, and all your focus and attention is on that, to such a degree that you are not able to reflect on and identify spiritual thirst.

But that in itself is indicative of a spiritual thirst, you have a need which you are still waiting for Jesus to come and meet – and when, not if, but when that occurs I have no doubt you will be well equipped to share how Jesus met that need – and so we’ll just continue to walk with you in prayer and support until that point.

Because the truth is friends that on the other side of your current circumstances, when Jesus meets that need in some way, there will be an amazing story which comes out of that, and the telling of that story gives glory to Christ, and bears witness to Him and encourages others who may be going through a similar set of circumstances to believe and have faith that Jesus will meet their need in some way.

Which leads me to ask all of us this morning – regardless of whether we are noticing spiritual thirst or not – Do we want other people to experience Jesus?

Do we want other people to experience Jesus?

Do you want your neighbors and the people on your street to experience Jesus? Do you want your co-workers to experience Jesus? Do you want your family members to experience Jesus? Do you want the people you see in the grocery store, in the coffee shop, at the gym or wherever you go to experience Jesus?

And in what way?

Now I'm pretty sure most of us are thinking yes... yes we want people to experience Jesus – but that's the big question right - in what way?

If I asked you to tell me I'm sure some of us would say we want people to experience Jesus as Savior, or as their Lord, or

to experience Jesus as God or as their provider or their friend, or to experience Jesus as the truth...

We might want people to experience Jesus as their healer, as their guide or teacher, or as their inspiration... or as one fellow once said to me *“Jesus is someone who is just really really important to know about.”*

In what way do we want people to experience Jesus?

Now if we are really honest we would also have to admit that part of us would like it if people, especially our teenagers, could experience Jesus in such a way that transforms them - fairly quickly - into well behaved, decent, hard-working, regular church-attending, people who make great neighbors, good co-workers and wonderful church members.

And I bring this up brothers and sisters because we need to be aware that not all of our motives for wanting people to experience Jesus are godly.

Certainly having people experience Jesus is a good thing, but “the way and the why” for which we want people to experience Him is important to be aware of as well – because it’s not right for us to use this for our own agenda or to try and control or manipulate people... or to make our job as parents easier.

If we want people to experience Jesus it needs to be for the right reasons – and we know these – but it is good to be aware that we have contradictory desires when it comes to answering the question of the way in which we want people to experience Him.

And if we look at the stories and or the examples which we find ourselves telling about Jesus we may just discover that they reveal we’re talking about Jesus with people with the desire to see them smarten up and behave appropriately.

For example a certain father was exasperated by his son’s long hair, so he said to him *“You know the bible says a man shouldn’t have long hair! You get a haircut - or you won’t be*

*allowed to drive the car anymore!”* To which the son replied *“Well Jesus had long hair!”* and the dad says *“Yes... and He walked everywhere He went.”*

All joking aside – these days you will hear many people telling stories about how Jesus was loving, and tolerant, about how He said to “love our enemies” and so on... and these are true stories, but why are people sharing these stories about Jesus? Because they want people to experience Jesus so that He will make them shape up and behave in a way which they approve of.

And the effectiveness of people telling these stories about Jesus is revealed in just how many people who are non-Christians are making comments these days about what behaviors and attitudes they believe are properly “Christian or not-Christian.”

And this shows us - that most often, people experience Jesus through the stories we tell about Him, and their

understanding of Him is shaped by those stories. Stories have power.

So, if we want people to experience Jesus - for all the right reasons; as Savior and Lord and God and the Truth and so on... then the most effective way to do this is to share our story and our experience of how Jesus became our Savior and Lord.

To tell our story of how we experienced Jesus as the Truth, as God, meeting our spiritual thirst – and the Holy Spirit will work through our stories to help other people experience Jesus in the same way.

So this month we're going to be looking at what we can learn about telling our stories from THE Story – The bible's story.

And the first thing we should notice is that there are different ways to tell our story – maybe you've noticed there are four different gospels that tell the story of Jesus, and there are about six or seven different kinds of literary genres in the bible

*(Law, Poetry, Prophecy, Gospel, Historical Narrative, Apocalyptic Literature, Wisdom literature and so on)*

So, your story about experiencing Christ does not have to be the same as the Apostle Paul who had a dramatic conversion experience on the road to Damascus... nor does it have to be the same as Lazarus who had Jesus literally bring him back to life...

So do not feel any pressure that your story has to be spectacular or dramatic – there is room for much variety and uniqueness in our stories.

But, as we look at some of these biblical stories of experiencing Jesus you will find your story has some similarities with them in regards to experiencing grace, or experiencing transformation, or experiencing freedom.

So, as unique as our story and experience of Jesus might be... the second thing the scriptures teach us about telling our stories of Jesus is that they are ultimately defined and

interpreted by how they fit into the Bible's overall big-picture story - which is all about Jesus Christ... Jesus himself says so in John 5:39 *"these are the very scriptures which testify about me..."*

And Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:15 that the *"the Holy Scriptures... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."*

So learning how to tell our story as a part of the bible's larger story keeps us from falling into the trap of telling stories about Jesus for the purpose of behaviorism and it is part of how the Holy Spirit uses it to allow other people to correctly experience Jesus Christ through it.

So, now that I've given you the big-picture about the big-picture - let's look at three helpful directions we can learn from the Acts 13 scripture passage we read this morning where the Apostle Paul used a big-picture story to tell people about Jesus.

And as we read it – I think it should be quite obvious as to why we would consider this a “big-picture” story in that Paul begins the story referring the God choosing Abraham and proceeds to work his way through the history of the people of Israel all the way up to his present day.

So it's big picture simply because it covers a big portion of the story in the scriptures.

But it's also a big-picture story because Paul doesn't start by simply saying to those who are listening *"let me tell you about a man named Jesus"* instead through telling specific highlight from the history of Israel Paul paints a big-picture to give them context to understand Jesus when he mentions Him.

Not that starting out by saying “let me tell you a story about a man named Jesus” would be wrong – but because Paul knows his audience well he has determined a “big-picture” story is going to work best to help them experience Jesus as the Messiah.

So first thing we can learn about telling our story is know who we are speaking to and the way in which they need to experience Jesus.

Paul knew his audience was devout Jews and God-fearing gentiles, all of whom would be very familiar with the Old Testament scriptures and stories and knew God's promises well – so it is a good idea for Paul to present Jesus as the promised Messiah and use the big-picture to help frame Jesus in this way.

So – when the Holy Spirit brings an opportunity across your path to tell your story about Jesus you need to determine the way in which people need to experience Jesus and if telling your story as a big-picture story is the best way to do that. It might well be.

Now, because Paul knew his audience needed to experience Jesus as the Messiah, he also anticipated that there would be some barriers to his presenting Jesus in that way.

Paul knew that his story would have to overcome his audience's reluctance, hesitation, perhaps even hostility to hearing that after all these years God's promised Messiah had finally arrived, and Paul knew that the Messiah had come in a manner that most Jews had not expected Him to.

Paul himself had not recognized Jesus as the Messiah until the resurrected Lord Jesus had confronted him and shown him that he was fighting against God by persecuting those who confessed Jesus was the Messiah.

Paul had experienced those barriers himself and so he anticipated that his story would have to overcome them in the hearts and minds of his listeners as well.

So Paul chooses specific highlights from the big-picture story of Scripture which will help to set the stage for his listeners to consider that Jesus is the Messiah and he tells these highlights in such a way that it emphasizes Israel receiving God's promises and blessings.

Paul talks about prospering in Egypt, but no mention of the slavery... he talks about how God brought them out of Egypt and graciously led them through the desert to Canaan – where God overthrew seven nations to give Israel their inheritance.

Then he summarizes the kind of leadership which Israel had – judges, then King Saul then King David and highlights how David was a man after God’s own heart and then say’s *“from this man’s descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised.”* (vs23)

Then Paul proceeds to give evidence that Jesus was acclaimed as the Messiah by the highly regarded John the Baptist, and he especially notes that the inability of the religious leaders and people in Jerusalem to recognize Jesus as the Messiah is in fact part of that prophetic evidence that people read every Sabbath day.

So you see how Paul is by choosing specific bits and pieces of information from the scriptures to build his big-picture story which are points that he has in common with his audience

that can help overcome any barriers they may have to experiencing Jesus as the promised Messiah.

Now Paul isn’t simply choosing what he likes from the bible and ignoring the rest – because the way in which he picks and chooses still honors and follows the storyline or the plotline of the bible – and that’s important for us to remember whenever we build a big-picture story as well that it follow the basic plotlines in the scripture.

Paul is still following the plotline of “God makes a promise to Israel and in spite of Israel’s unfaithfulness, God ends up keeping his promises to them.”

Then Paul closes his big-picture story by explicating stating what it means for them that Jesus has come as the promised Messiah. He says *“I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses...”* (vs. 39)

And then Paul warns them not to let the unexpected way in which the Messiah had come make them miss out on what God is doing for His people.

So – what have we learned so far?

- 1) Know who you are telling your story to, so listen before you speak...
- 2) Determine how they need to experience Jesus, avoid the behaviorism temptation...
- 3) Anticipate what barriers you will need to overcome;
- 4) Select highlights from the story of the scriptures that will help you present Jesus and overcome those barriers;
- 5) Be sure to connect with common points of experience and belief;
- 6) Be very specific about how you are presenting Jesus;
- 7) Let them know what they must do in response;

So – let me give you an example of how I often do this.

It has become my practice over the past few years to go out for coffee with our highschool graduates before they leave Valleyview and head off to college.

So I know who I'm telling the story to and I know how they need to experience Jesus, in part because I have quite a few years of youth ministry experience.

And I have seen that most teenagers experience following Jesus as a means of trying to make sure they stay out of trouble, avoid drinking and drugs and promiscuity, study hard and get good grades so they can go off to college and have a good future.

The problem is that now they are going to be old enough to do all those things that their faith has been about staying away from - so what does their faith in Jesus have to do with life anymore? For many college kids it becomes irrelevant.

They need to experience Jesus now as someone who gives them a big vision for their life and I believe telling them a big-



picture story is the best way to help them experience Jesus like this.

But I anticipate that they will be reluctant to hear this because they are so accustomed to hearing about Jesus and what they should or shouldn't do.

So I build a big-picture story – using the biblical storyline of Creation, Fall, Redemption, New Creation – that can overcome that reluctance and help them experience Jesus' vision for their life.

I start off by find common points of experience by asking them what they are into, or what their area of interest or study is going to be – and show them how that is part of God's creation and how God loves and cares for that particular part of the creation just as much as they do – maybe even more...

Then we talk about the sorts of things they have seen go wrong with that area of interest and how that affects people, or themselves and what the consequences are.

That gives me the opportunity to move to the next part of the biblical story and relate how Adam and Eve's fall into sin and how it affects every part of the creation – just as we've been talking about.

So then I am able to transition into talking about Redemption because no one want to be left hanging with all that bad news, and I explain how John 3:16 says "God so loved the cosmos – the beautiful arrangement - which includes that thing you love or want to study... that He sent Jesus Christ."

And I specifically say that Jesus came to save engineering, or medicine, or music or art and I share how coming to that realization for me when I was in university was a turning point in my experience of Jesus and gave me a much bigger purpose and vision for my life than just getting a degree to get a good job and make money.

Then I can share how those who follow Jesus participate in His mission to save and redeem the different parts of His creation as a statement of faith that Jesus is coming back to bring in

the New Creation – which includes a fully purified and sanctified “whatever it is” that they love and want to study.

And then I am able to close off this big-picture story by reminding them that they now need to take responsibility to grow their faith and trust in Jesus while at school so that indeed they can learn how to pursue their kingdom calling and be a part of the New Heavens and Earth when Jesus returns.

And that’s just one way to tell your story about experiencing Jesus as a big-picture story... I hope that it gets you thinking about how you might tell yours in that way.

Perhaps this is the kind of framework that you’ve been looking for – because you’re a big-picture kind of person and the Holy Spirit is going to use you to share it with other big-picture kind of people.

So please, take it and run with it – use this timeline on the back of the sermon notes to help craft your big picture story and I’m happy to help you with it.

But it’s not the only way to tell your story so if you struggle to connect with the big-picture, that’s ok - we’re going to look at three other ways to tell your story as well.

The important part is to find one that really connects with you and learn to tell your story about Jesus with it so that it just comes naturally to you and the Holy Spirit will connect you with people that need to hear it.

So brothers and sisters – do you want people to experience Jesus? Then be sure you know how to tell a good story.

Amen.