

Sermon Notes

WORSHIP SERVICE - 8.31.2025

PART 30 - THE SPIRIT SENDS, THE GOSPEL TRIUMPHS

I. INTRODUCTION

- Up until this point in Acts, we've seen the witnesses of the risen Christ take the gospel to Jerusalem, into Judea, Samaria, and to both Jews and Gentiles.
- But now in our text today which is Acts chapter 13, Luke pivots to the kickoff event of the gospel going out to the ends of the earth which is Paul's first missionary journey.
- Up through chapter 12, the gospel has gone forth primarily into the mainland regions of Palestine and Syria.
- The gospel has been going forth! The word has been multiplying, it's been shared first to the Jews, but as we saw recently, Peter took the gospel to the gentiles. And the faithful church in Antioch spread the gospel to the Hellenists.
- But that progression so far has been from Jerusalem out to Judea to Samaria, and now it's time to begin global expansion. It's time to go to the ends of the earth.
- The main point is that as we carry the gospel to the nations, we will encounter opposition, but the Spirit who sends us secures its triumph.

Acts 13:1-12

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.

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.

II. A SPIRITUAL CALLING

- If you recall from several weeks back, Barnabas and Saul in Acts 11:30 had been sent from the church in Antioch, where they were busy teaching the people the word of God, to go down to Jerusalem with financial help for the saints there, in generous response to the famine that was prophesied.
- And at the end of that chapter in 12:25 we see Barnabas and Saul have returned from their trip down to Jerusalem, and traveled back north to Antioch, bringing with them John Mark.
- And in coming up from Jerusalem, we again see the continued pattern of gospel advancement starting from Jerusalem and then proceeding out to the whole earth.
- Barnabas and Saul now start from Jerusalem, heading out back up to Antioch, and it is there they will then be commissioned by the Holy Spirit to head even further out with the good news of the gospel.
- We're told a bit about the leadership team in the church at Antioch. It says in verse 1 that there were in this urban church, prophets and teachers.
- We have Barnabas the encourager. He's a Levite, as we're told in Acts 4, and a native of Cyprus, where we'll shortly see him head to with Saul.
- We have Simeon, who we don't really know much about. We know he was also called Niger, meaning black or dark, and therefore was likely from one of the Ethiopian nations. We really don't know much else about him.
- Next we have Lucias of Cyrene, perhaps the same Lucias Paul refers to in the book of Romans whom he names as one of his kinsmen. He was a significant leader in this early church of Antioch and in the work of the gospel.
- Manaen grew up in Herod the Great's household as the half-brother of Herod Antipas. After Herod the Great passed, his kingdom was split into 4, each fourth ruled by a tetrarch.
- So Manaen grew up in luxury, in high society, probably received a fine education as he lived among the rulers of his day. But here we see he has been removed from that life, called out of darkness and into the light, saved by grace, and is now named among the leaders of the early church in Antioch.
- There are parallels here to another leader in the OT - Moses. He was brought up in Pharaoh's household. Grew up among the princes of Egypt, surrounded by wealth, Egyptian high society education, living among the rulers. But God called him out to the wilderness, chose him to lead his people. And God chose Manaen to lead in this early church in Antioch.
- Just as in ages past when God chose from a single family Jacob rather than Esau, choosing one to experience his mercy and another to experience his justice, likewise within the family of Herod, we see Manaen chosen to experience God's mercy, his great salvation, and Herod wasn't.
- And like a big city which is generally quite diverse, so here is the leadership. They come from different ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds.
- Saul grew up being trained as a Pharisee, studying the law of Moses. Lucias grew up on an island of North Africa. Manaen came from the elite class of the ruling family and Roman high society.
- A diverse church is not an obstacle to gospel work, it's an enabler! Our racial, cultural, socio-economic or age differences enable us to better reach a diverse world in need of the gospel, which is the very thing that we all hold in common and brings us together in unity!

- When we were introduced to the church in Antioch, we saw the whole church engaged in gospel outreach, and generosity, and the grace of God upon them. They were growing under the sound teaching of Saul and Barnabas prior to their trip to Jerusalem.
- But now they have returned to Antioch, and some time has passed. The church has grown, and it's not just Saul and Barnabas leading them, but also Simeon, Manaen, and Lucias.
- We see in verse 2 that they are busy worshiping and fasting. The whole church that we saw on mission in sharing the gospel to those in their city is also on point here within the church—worshiping the Lord and fasting.
- We have weekly rhythms of worship together here on Sunday mornings as we worship him in praise and adoration. We worship him because He is worthy, worthy of all our worship, worthy of all we have to give back to him.
- Romans 12:1-2 *1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*
- Those verses help us understand what true worship is - worshipping the Lord for his many mercies, that is, his goodness, his love, his grace, his mercy, his kindness towards us and on and on!
- And so we worship him in presenting ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. We offer up ourselves - our thoughts, our words, our actions, our bodies, our lives - they are all for him, to worship him, to glorify him and enjoy him forever as is the chief end of man.
- The church in Antioch was engaged in worshipping the Lord. And also in fasting. In giving up eating so that they would have more time to pray and worship the Lord.
- Notice that fasting is never done by itself. It's not a good work to be done that has any merit in itself. It's a negative action which then supplies the means for a positive action. It's a subtraction from your day that you might add something important. More worship in our lives is an immensely good thing. We need more worship. When we worship the Lord, we are valuing him more than anything else, and that is a right perspective to have of the king of Glory.
- John Calvin: *Let us say something about fasting, because many, for want of knowing its usefulness, undervalue its necessity, and some reject it as almost superfluous; while, on the other hand where the use of it is not well understood, it easily degenerates into superstition. Holy and legitimate fasting is directed to three ends; for we practice it either as a restraint on the flesh, to preserve it from licentiousness, or as a preparation for prayers and pious meditations, or as a testimony of our humiliation in the presence of God when we are desirous of confessing our guilt before him. (Institutes, IV.12, 14, 15)*
- Vs 2 - The Holy Spirit puts out a call. The Holy Spirit moves! He moves in the hearts of the people of the church. As they are worshipping and fasting, the Holy Spirit reveals to them that he has a mission to be undertaken.
- Just like when Abram was told "Go to a land I will show you". The calling is clear, but the details are not. Answering the call of God requires a step of faith, doesn't it? We don't know how it will work out, how it will end, what all will happen. But when the Lord calls, we must answer and take that step of faith.
- The Holy Spirit moves while they are worshipping and fasting. And then they respond with more praying and fasting. And this time of fasting and prayer confirmed for them, gave them confidence that this was indeed the will of the Lord that these two men among them, Barnabas and Saul, were to be consecrated for the work of the Lord.

- Laying on of the hands was a practice of the early church, still practiced today. No power in it, but symbolic of the blessing of God, the anointing of the power of God. Symbolic here of the consecration of these men to the work of the Lord.
- Saul and Barnabas were sent out by the church, Consecrated and sent, but if they are to accomplish anything, it must be by the power of the Holy Spirit, not going in their own power. This is important.
- These men were commissioned and sent out by the Holy Spirit, but then the church, recognizing the call of the Spirit, followed the leading of the Spirit in their sending. The Spirit is the one who sends, with the church as the agent he uses in the sending.
- There was no individualism here. Beware of those who have a self-proclaimed call of the Lord upon their lives. The church was involved here in sensing the leading of the Holy Spirit and confirming the call being put on Saul and Barnabas.
- There is no institutional determination here. The church wasn't acting as an entity or organization directing its members on its own; it was following the leading of the Holy Spirit and testing the leading of the Spirit and no decision was made by the church without the involvement of the Holy Spirit.
- Our church is to be sensitive, especially our elders here, to the leading of the Spirit in terms of whom he might be calling among us to spiritual work or to further use their spiritual gifts.
- There is clear direction in the revealed will of God via scripture that we are to use our gifts for the edification of the church. If you're an encourager, then encourage others! If you're compassionate, then move with acts of mercy and charity.
- May we too follow the example set by this Antioch church plant who were faithful in their devotion to the gospel mission in their city.
- They were listening and sensitive to the call of the Holy Spirit to send off Saul and Barnabas to other cities and other places with the gospel message, that they too might receive salvation and churches would be planted, not just in their city, but going to the ends of the earth.
- Pray and fast that we would be a church on mission, faithful to reach our friends and neighbors with the gospel. And let's be faithful in our worship, our prayer, and our fasting, expecting the Lord to move mightily in our area!
- And so in verse 4 of Acts now we see the kickoff of arguably the greatest missionary work in all of history. Saul's first missionary journey.
- Now I find it interesting how Luke portrays these missionary journeys of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth because he mostly focuses on the missionary journeys of Saul primarily and how the gospel goes out north and west of Jerusalem, eventually with Paul's ultimate destination of Rome.
- We don't have the accounts of the gospel going south, or west of Jerusalem though. We aren't given accounts of Thomas taking the gospel to Kerala in southern India for example.
- Saul and Barnabas leave Antioch and head to Seleucia which was about 16 miles from Antioch which was where the harbor to sail from was. Seleucia served as the seaport for Antioch, the third largest city in the Roman empire at that time, which was in modern day eastern Turkey.
- So they board a ship and sail to Salamis which is a port city on the eastern side of the island of Cyprus.
- Cyprus was 130 miles out into the Mediterranean from Seleucia, so you could see it on a clear day, and would take several hours of sailing with a good wind.
- They start by proclaiming the gospel in the synagogue, among the Jews. A continuation of the pattern of bringing the gospel to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles.
- Paul touched on this pattern in Romans 1:16 *"16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who*

believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

- So starting in the synagogue to the Jews first, then they move on and proceed to share the gospel all across the island of Cyprus. Eventually they moved all the way across from the east side in Salamis to Paphos, which was 90 miles to the west. These guys are covering ground!

III. A SPIRITUAL CONFLICT

- And when they get to Paphos, there we learn they encounter spiritual opposition by means of a magician, a sorcerer, a false prophet named Bar-Jesus, who had the ear of the Proconsul.
- Sergius Paulus was the Roman proconsul of this area. And for a little context, control of this area had been shifted from the emperor Claudius to the Senate, who then commissioned a Proconsul to govern the area.
- That commission was given to Sergius Paulus. And Sergius Paulus, like many of the Romans in that time, found the dark arts and practices of the occult very interesting.
- Generally, those dark arts came from the cultures in the east, where occultic practices were common. But in this case, it comes from...a Jew.
- A man named Bar-Jesus, also called Elymas in Greek meaning magician, but he wasn't a magician. He couldn't do magic tricks. But he did deceive. Scripture calls him a sorcerer and a false prophet. He was practicing sorcery and the occult. Interacting with demons.
- In the Old Testament, Jews who did this, those who were sorcerers, soothsayers, fortune tellers - they were subject to the penalty of death. These practices were an abomination to the Lord, they were repulsive. They involved worship and delight of evil fallen angels who had rebelled against the Lord and sought to thwart him and his kingdom.
- This man as a Jew though had no problem making money by casting fortunes and interacting with the occult if it would make him a buck.
- And unfortunately this false prophet and sorcerer was with Sergius Paulus, who wanted to hear the good news of the gospel. He was a man of intelligence, and he summoned Saul and Barnabas so that he may hear the Word of God.
- The Holy Spirit is leading Saul and Barnabas in their proclamation of the gospel, and the demonic forces are leading Elymas in his opposition to it.
- We must be clear here: there is spiritual opposition against the proclamation of the word of God, against the gospel, and we need to be aware of that.
- That opposition may try and silence the word going forth. It may be to try and dissuade those hearing, to convince them against the truth of the word. It may be to try and change the focus of the conversation, change it into an argument or derail the conversation completely.
- It may be to introduce a competing message, a false gospel coming from a false prophet like Elymas. Oftentimes, if we're completely honest, here in the United States, here in Central Florida, we see the tactic of creating strong cultural walls around topics and implied comfort zones. We see here an implied wall that puts sharing the gospel outside our comfort zone.
- And many in the church have been silenced by their inability to get out of their comfort zones and battle against the opposition tactic of comfort!
- You and I must see that sticking to socially acceptable and comfortable conversations is a spiritual tactic designed to silence our proclamation of the gospel!
- We must be aware of the spiritual opposition we face. We're reminded of that in Ephesians 6:
- *Eph 6:10-12 10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand*

against the schemes of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

- Not to fear though; we're told we're to be strong in the Lord and in his strength, and he is the one who is greater and stronger than any who oppose him. But we are to be aware of spiritual opposition and on guard against it.
- Going on to verse 9 we see Saul's response; but from now on he's referred to as Paul - Saul, his Hebrew name when he goes to the Jews, but now he's going to the Gentiles, so he uses his Latin/Greek name.
- Notice that Paul doesn't respond defensively. He doesn't respond privately, or gently. He doesn't respond in aggravation or from his own flesh, but he responds filled with the Holy Spirit. This is a Spirit-filled response!
- His response is a rebuke who Elymas was, starting with the stark contrast between his Jewish name and his actions of opposition.
- Bar-Jesus means "son of Joshua" or "son of the savior". But Paul calls him out as the opposite of his name. "You're not the son of the Savior, you are the son of the devil! You don't stand with the righteous one! You are an enemy of all righteousness!"
- John 1:14 tells us that our savior Jesus is full of grace and truth, but this man is full of deceit and villainy. When we walk in the ways of the Lord, when we follow after him fully trusting him, our paths are straight. But this man was attempting to make crooked the straight paths of the Lord.
- This was not the way we're told to follow in Proverbs 3:5-6: *"5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."*
- Notice that Paul, being led by the Holy Spirit, doesn't mince words here. He gives a strong but just condemnation of this one opposing the good news of the gospel. He's not saying anything untoward or ungodly as he calls this man out.
- Some Christians today will take the stance that condemnation of sin is grounds for the strongest language, and use that as justification for cussing and use of foul language which shouldn't be on any Christian's lips.
- Paul uses incredibly strong language here, absolutely, but he doesn't make it vulgar, he keeps it accurate, and he's led by the Holy Spirit.
- But berating sin or sinners with vulgar language and cussing, that's not of the Spirit, that's of the flesh, and we are to avoid that kind of speech.
- This was a good, just, judgement on Elymas. He was trying to make the light of the gospel appear to the proconsul as darkness, trying to make his own darkness appear as light, and now the judgement he's incurred was the very light he had turned to darkness.
- This Bar-Jesus had been confronted by the light of the gospel, and now cannot see. Both losses of vision were temporary, for a time. They required the men to be guided by the hands of others. At the end of Paul's time of blindness though, we're told he received the Lord and was baptized. We aren't told the outcome for Bar-Jesus.

IV. A SPIRITUAL CONVERSION

- We are told the outcome for the proconsul though. It says verse 12 he believed! When he saw what had occurred, he believed, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.
- What better outcome than a lost soul turning to the Lord! Sergius Paulus saw the spiritual opposition brought against the proclamation of the message of the Gospel, the opposition which stood against the Lord.

- And then he witnessed the Holy Spirit breaking through and triumphing over that opposition that the Word, the teaching of the Lord, was clearly and mightily proclaimed.
- And the proconsul was astonished by this. He was amazed, also translated as deeply impressed, or shaken to the core. This triumph of the Holy Spirit was so clear and evident to him that it impacted him to his core, and he believed.
- And he is recorded in scripture as the first, truly and fully Gentile convert who had no ties to Judaism, or the law of Moses. This is why Paul and Silas were sent off on this missionary journey. That the gospel would go to the ends of the earth.
- The amazing things we see in our passage here - the accounts of the church, and these various characters, the people that Paul and Barnabas encountered in their travels, and all of the actions along the way—the amazing thing is that in every circumstance we see the Holy Spirit active and at work!
- He is leading, guiding, directing, breaking down opposition, opening the eyes of the blind to the good news of the gospel!
- He is actively, and powerfully at work so that the teaching of the Lord, the good news of the gospel, will continue to spread, even in spite of strong spiritual opposition!
- There is spiritual opposition to the gospel today. Here in our community. We need to be aware of it. Be on guard against it.
- But what an encouragement for us that just like King Herod and the rulers of this world couldn't stop the Word which went forth and multiplied and ultimately triumphed, so too the spiritual opposition we face cannot stop the gospel, it will go forth!
- And God in his infinite wisdom and sovereignty has ordained us as the means by which this message is taken to the ends of the earth. Longwood, Lake Mary, Sanford, those are the parts of the earth we have been commissioned to reach.
- And though we will face spiritual opposition, we must press forward with our bold proclamation of the gospel, having confidence that the Holy Spirit is with us and at work and will ultimately triumph over all who oppose the word of the Lord.
- Even as we carry the gospel to the nations, we will encounter opposition. It's to be expected. But the Spirit, the one who sends us out, secures its triumph as he overcomes opposition and continues to expand the kingdom of God and draw lost sinners to himself.
- You and I are a part of that. And whatever version of opposition we encounter, our God is faithful, sovereign, and patient as he draws lost souls to himself for the glory of his marvelous name!

APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

In light of today's message....

- What did I learn about the gospel?
- How can I apply what I learned about the gospel to my life?
- With whom can I share the gospel this week?