

In the first three verses of chapter 13, which we studied last time, we read about how God set apart Barnabas and Saul for an evangelistic mission to reach people in places far away, who had not heard the gospel. After the Holy Spirit made it clear that Barnabas and Saul were God's chosen instruments, and after fasting and praying, the people in the church of Antioch laid their hands on the two and sent them out, commissioning them for missionary service.

Beginning in tonight's passage, and continuing throughout the rest of the book of Acts, we will see Luke's record of how the gospel spread to the rest of the known world, and how Paul became God's primary instrument to reach Jews, and Gentiles, with the message of God's saving grace, through faith in Jesus Christ. Let's consider how the gospel spreads today, as we examine the example of the gospel's spread in our passage this evening. Please read Acts 13:4-12.

Notice back in verse 3, the bible says that the church sent the men off, but verse 4 says the Holy Spirit sent them. This reminds us that in order to do effective missions, or any ministry for that matter, we just can't decide we want to do something, without first making sure that our hearts are aligned with the will of God, as revealed by His Holy Spirit. This missionary effort would be destined to fail without empowerment from the Holy Spirit, and we will see throughout the rest of the book of Acts, the central roll played by the Holy Spirit.

If you are a born again Christian, you have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. All believers have the same Spirit. If the same Spirit leads us all, we are able to arrive, collectively, at the will of God. When God calls someone by His Holy Spirit, to some ministry, or mission, and that person answers the call in good faith, God will then bless, and equip, that person to do what needs to be done to fulfill His will.

On the other hand, if we set out on our own, without the aid of the Holy Spirit, whatever we try to do is destined to fail. I would not have entered the ministry had not God spoken to me so clearly. I would never have survived Seminary, had not God gone before me. I could not be one of your pastors, had not the Holy Spirit called me, gifted me, and directed me. I would be terrified at the thought of preaching a sermon without going to God in prayer, and asking for the Holy Spirit's empowerment, and protection against saying anything that was not from God.

The bible says that when they left Antioch, they went to the port city of Seleucia, about 16 miles away, and then sailed to Cypress. Cypress is an Island, off the coast, in the Mediterranean Sea. Barnabas was from Cypress, so he was very familiar with the whole Island, had some contacts, and was still the leader of the group at this point.

The bible says that when they arrived at Salamis, they went first to the Jewish Synagogues. This is a pattern that we will see throughout Paul's ministry, and if you think about it, it makes perfect sense. The Jews were looking for Messiah, they had the promise of God in the Old Testament scriptures, and the heart of the gospel for the Jews was that Messiah has come. We don't know how the Jews in Cypress responded to the gospel message, but we read later that in many places Paul traveled, they rejected the message and persecuted Paul. Still, some received the truth and became followers of Christ. Nearly everyplace he went, Paul preached the gospel to the Jews first.

Verse 5 says that Barnabas and Saul took a man named John along with them, to be their assistant. This was John Mark, who accompanied them on the relief mission to Jerusalem, as we read in chapter 12. He was a cousin of Barnabas. Something happened, which the bible does not make clear, that caused John Mark to return home before completing the missionary journey with Barnabas and Saul. In chapter 15, when they are about to depart on the second missionary

journey, Paul and Barnabas get into a fight over whether or not to take John Mark again. Paul argues that he quit before the mission was completed before; he is just going to quit again. Barnabas insists that his cousin comes, and finally, they part ways. Barnabas returns to Cyprus, with John Mark, and Paul travels to Tarsus, and beyond, with Silas, seeking to spread the gospel in that area. John Mark later becomes partners with Peter in the ministry, and writes the first gospel account, which we call Mark.

As we consider Paul's accusation that John Mark failed in his first mission's effort, we must also remember that he was a disciple of Christ. In spite of his shortcomings, God still used him, and we are made all the richer through the inspired words recorded in his gospel. This should serve as an encouragement to us, because the only people, who never fail at something, are people who never do anything. If you or I get into a ministry, and things do not go the way we hoped or imagined, it does not mean that God is done with us. We just have to regroup and press on, according to what the Holy Spirit lays upon our hearts.

The bible says that they shared the gospel with the whole island as far as Paphos, which is about 100 miles inland. Paphos was the seat of government on the Island of Cyprus. The proconsul, or governor of the province, was as a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul because he wanted them to share the word of God with him.

Here we have an educated man who wants to hear the gospel. God has already prepared his heart. He either already knew Barnabas, or he has heard about Barnabas as Saul, and the impact they have made on the people he governed. He probably heard some personal testimonies of others who had been saved, and he wanted to know and understand the gospel message. He wanted to know if this message is real, because if it was true, he wanted to be saved too.

This was a huge event, because if the governor gave his life to Jesus, his influence could open the doors for many of those under his authority to come to Christ. But, just like today, the devil is not going to let any great advance of the kingdom of God go unchallenged, and he uses other people, and circumstances, to build roadblocks to the advance of the gospel, and the salvation of souls.

The devil's tool to oppose the salvation of Sergius Paulus, was a man by the name of Bar-Jesus, which means son of Jesus. The bible says that he was a magician, or a sorcerer, and a Jewish false prophet. Apparently he was an attendant or advisor to the proconsul. He was a man who had some influence with the governor, and was threatened by the governor's interest in the gospel. In verse 8 we learn he also went by the name Elymas, which means magician.

While Barnabas and Saul were trying to lead Sergius Paulus to faith in Christ, Elymas was trying to turn him from faith. This is the spiritual battle that we see repeated throughout the book of Acts. It is the same spiritual battle that we face when we try to share the gospel with the lost in this world today.

Everywhere Paul went he faced opposition. Whenever we try to reach others with the gospel, or take a stand on the truth of God's word, we too should expect to encounter some opposition. Until the Lord returns there will always be people who will deny the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, laugh at those who hold to a biblical worldview, and deny salvation by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and Him alone. They accuse us of being superstitious, ignorant, and backward. They laugh at us, paint us as ridiculous, and try to persuade others that they will be just as ignorant if they follow Christ. The devil uses them to stand opposed to all that God had done to offer salvation to anyone who has the heart and will to believe.

This encounter with Elymas marks a change in the course of the book of Acts. In verse 9 we see Saul referred to as Paul for the first time. From here on out, Luke always refers to Paul,

the Greek name equivalent of Saul. Also, with one exception, Paul's name is mentioned before Barnabas, instead of the other way around. In chapter 15, when addressing the Jerusalem Counsel concerning Gentiles not having to become Jews in order to be saved, Barnabas is mentioned ahead of Paul. Apparently Barnabas had more clout with the church in Jerusalem, and was the primary speaker. Everywhere else, Luke recognizes Paul as the primary leader.

Luke gives Paul the attention here, because he stood up to Elymas. Notice that he did not stand on his own, but he stood in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is key for us. We need the presence, power, and authority of the Holy Spirit, if we hope to be effective in our witness and our ministries.

Paul looked intently at Elymas. He glared at him, looked him in the eye, and put him in his place. You are not the son of Jesus; you are the son of the devil. You are not speaking the truth; you are full of deceit, a liar, an enemy of God, and everything that is righteous. You are a stumbling block to everyone who desires to come to Christ to be saved, and a barrier to everything godly.

Most of us would be more timid than Paul if we were confronted with a similar situation. In fact, in our flesh we tend to cower in the face of people who seem to have more influence or power than we do. But that need not be the case, if we speak in the power of the Holy Spirit. What is right is always right, and what is ungodly is always wrong.

Paul stood his ground, and for that, he became God's primary instrument in the spread of the gospel. In the power of the Holy Spirit, we read of the first miracle that God performed through Paul. He pronounced that God's hand was against Elymas, and that he would be blinded as a result of his actions. The bible paints a picture of an arrogant and powerful man humbled, stumbling in the darkness, seeking someone who would lead him by the hand. It is a fearful thing to fall into the judgment of God.

God's judgment was deserved, but it also served another important function. The proconsul was astonished at what he saw, and the demonstration of God's power. It was all the evidence he needed to believe. He heard the gospel, he saw it was real, and he got saved when he surrendered his life in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Sometimes it takes a bold stand to get people to understand the power of God, the reliability of scriptures, and eternal life that is offered through faith in Jesus Christ. However, the proconsul would not have ever been saved, if no one shared the gospel with him. He could not have been saved without the actions of the Holy Spirit. Paul could not have been so bold, so effective, and so powerful, without the Holy Spirit.

When we read accounts like this in the bible it helps us to better understand how God works, and thus how he will work in us. They teach us to be bold, and to rely upon the Holy Spirit. They remind us of things eternally important, and they challenge us to share the love of Christ in this lost world.

The gospel message is not so hard to understand that it should be difficult for us to share. God in His love took on flesh to save us from our sins. Jesus sacrificed Himself on the cross, taking the penalty for our sin in His flesh. He won victory over sin and death by His resurrection from the grave. Confess your sins to God; ask Him to forgive you, as you commit to live for him. Trust Jesus. Invite Him into your heart to be Savior and Lord. Place all of your faith in Him and the promises of God's Word. Receive the Holy Spirit so that He may gift you, empower you, and direct your life, and you will be saved and inherit eternal life.

This is the gospel message, and the hope we hold out to the lost world. In the end, it is the only thing that matters. We have been given the words of life. Let us embrace them and share them, in the power of the Spirit, to the glory of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.