

Acts 13:1–12

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[0 : 0 0] is Acts chapter 13 verses 1 through 12. Please stand for the reading of God's word. Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manan, a lifelong friend of Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul. 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. Then after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off. So being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them. 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. He was with the proconsul Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas, the magician, for that is the meaning of his name, opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him 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? 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. Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

It's a joy to be together this morning, and as we make our way, just a brief prayer.

Father, we turn to your word, and they are not empty words for us, but they are our very life. And so, Father, we pray that you would enliven us, enlighten us, by your word, through your spirit, that these would not be mere words, but that they would impart life to us. Help us, oh God.

We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Well, we've come to a decisive point in the book of Acts this morning. It's a turning point.

Literarily, it's presented the same way as the church of Jerusalem when it first was introduced in chapter 1, verse 12. You may remember the 12 were assembled in a room, in the upper room in Jerusalem, and Luke begins listing the 11 disciples at that point in order to initiate the New Testament church in Jerusalem.

[3 : 2 8] And here we find ourselves this morning at the beginning of chapter 13, and literarily, Luke does the same thing. He tells us they're in a new city, not Jerusalem. Now they're in Antioch.

And he doesn't list off 11 names, but lists off 5. We know how the church of Antioch emerged according to chapter 11. She was a generous church. She had taken up a collection for brothers and sisters in Jerusalem, in Judea, who needed relief in time of famine.

Antioch was generous with material and financial resources. And this morning, her generosity continues. Not in the sending of monetary resources, but sending out two of their best.

Luke will show us what it looked like in the early church to dispatch individuals for the propagation of the gospel. The gospel's propagation emerged from a divine command resulting in human initiative.

God ordered it. God ordered it. And the church did it. This morning, we will see the servants of God commissioned, according to verses 1 to 4.

[4 : 4 6] The servants of God commissioned or sent out, followed by the servants of God confronted. Confronted in verses 5 to 12. The servants of God are commissioned.

The church in Antioch is well-staffed. It was an assembly of gifted servants of the gospel. Luke records for us, they were prophets and teachers. He doesn't say who was who, or which was which,

or which possessed which.

But the list comprised the five names, some of which are familiar, namely Barnabas at the front end and Saul at the back end. Men we've already met earlier in Acts.

But Luke begins to describe the middle three. He gives us a little description of each of them. We see Simeon, who is also called Niger, which simply means darker, or black, of dark complexion. He may have been African, but he could have been simply someone of darker complexion from the other regions of the Mediterranean. We see Lucius of Cyrene, who's from North Africa.

[5 : 52] And we have Menean, a lifelong friend of Herod the Tetrarch. He was one who grew up in the royal court. It's difficult to keep track of all the Herods. Herod is actually a title.

So you'd be mistaken to think that he was Herod the Great, who built the temple. It's not Herod the Great. You would be mistaken to think that it was Herod Agrippa, mentioned earlier in chapter 12. Instead, this is Herod the Tetrarch, the one announced in Luke chapter 3, verse 1. Incidentally, he's the one who imprisoned John the Baptist and later on went to behead him.

All that to say, Menean was a close friend of that Herod. The one who had beheaded the servant of the Lord, who had come on the scene to make straight the paths of the Lord, has now become his, or Menean, the good friend, is now a founder of the church in Antioch.

One commentator actually says Menean was probably in his 60s, mid-60s at this point in life. We've already met Barnabas. He's of Jewish descent. He's a native of the island of Cyprus.

[7 : 03] We've learned of Saul, who also is of Jewish descent, a Roman citizen, highly educated, a former member of the religious elite, the Pharisees, originating from Tarsus.

What Luke wants to establish here is he wants to convey the diversity of the five. They are not only ethnically diverse, originating from different places, they are educationally diverse.

They are intergenerational. They are socioeconomically diverse. At least one is from wealth. We know that Barnabas probably came from a wealthy family. He had excess land that he was able to sell and to contribute to the movement of the gospel.

We know Menean that know to be able to befriend and grow up in Herod's court. Definitely, he grew up amongst royalty.

He was of higher status. They were observably far more different than similar, these five. Yet that which bound them together would overcome all these other earthly qualities, these earthly categories.

[8 : 17] These five, who are very diverse, are found worshipping a single object, subject. Namely, the Lord, according to verse 2.

The reason these five got together is because of their shared affinity for the Lord Jesus Christ. Luke is enunciating the diversity of those gathered while highlighting their unity in the Lord Jesus Christ. Arguably, this is one of the most powerful apologetics you will ever see to the truthfulness of the gospel. It is for no other reason that such a group like us of peculiar individuals would assemble together this morning.

We are not here championing a particular social issue, though we're concerned about social issues. We are not meeting because we have like-minded tastes in music.

We don't. I share an office with TJ. We don't. We don't. I'm just kidding. We are not meeting as enthusiasts of a particular hobby.

[9 : 27] We are assembled this morning by no other explanation than the fact that we bear the marks of the transformative power of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is why we assemble this morning.

And it is in this worship context that the church at Antioch receives the only direct command, the only direct imperative in the entire book.

The Holy Spirit says, give me those two, namely Barnabas and Saul, for the work I have called them out for. From among Antioch's well-stocked leadership, the Holy Spirit would take two and reserve them for a particular purpose.

They were commissioned in a particular and specific sense. They were set apart to be sent out, commissioned. We must know who they are being commissioned by.

Luke is cautious to tell us that it was the Holy Spirit that set them apart, according to verse 2. And we'll find out in verse 4, it is the Holy Spirit that sends them out.

[10 : 34] Verse 3 simply highlights how the church came to affirm the Spirit's calling on Barnabas and Saul. The church lays their hands on them after fasting and praying and sends them out.

See, the process of laying their hands on these individuals is not to signify their calling. Rather, it's the church together saying that we affirm God's calling on their lives.

It signified the whole community's approval. This way, Antioch, really, the church at Antioch, lays down for us the first church that sees foreign mission as the enterprise of the people of God.

Well, see, the human tendency for you and I is probably to, oh, let's build something large in Antioch. We want to keep Saul. We want to keep Barnabas.

Given the array of gods in Antioch, the city, we want to build a shrine or a temple or something massive that will rival these Greco-Roman gods.

[11 : 47] Yet the heart of God is not content with being stationary. If you grab hold of any spiritual truth this morning, seize this. God, in his very nature, is one who sends his servants to save his people.

God, by his very nature, is one who sends his servants to save his people. The Lord does not wait passively for people to approach him, though we can.

Rather, he actively pursues. He is one seeking to save. He goes to gather. He was made in human likeness so that humans could be made in his likeness.

He is what some call a missional God. He is on mission. He is a sending God. He sent his son to save.

He has sent his spirit to lead others to the saving work of his son. We see it in Jesus, don't we? He dispatches 12.

[12 : 54] Then he dispatches 70. And here in Acts, he dispatches another two. Why? Because to this very day, it continues. The Lord sends his servants to save his people.

I'm not saying you and I can go out and just save people on a whim. We don't. But we are the very medium that God chooses. Are we not? He does not save through angels.

He does not save through animals. He does not save through nature. He saves through our feeble mouths and our broken lives. So much so that the Bible later on will say that we are co-laborers.

That we are God's fellow workers. See? God is on the move. We travel for leisure.

We travel for commerce and trade. We travel for profit. We travel to acquire experiences. We travel for rest. God travels to gain glory for himself.

[13 : 52] God is discontent with a stationary gospel that goes nowhere. The gospel is not meant to be enshrined in a case set up in museums to be memorialized.

It is intended to go forth. It is sent out with the intention to save. The gospel is not fine china to sit on display never to be used.

The gospel is a newspaper that needs to be delivered every single morning. All the time. Every day. But, Bing, it is not new news. It is not new news.

It is old news. But it is the good news. Delivered 2,000 years ago. And still needs to be delivered today. God would not be content with just Antioch.

He wants the ends of the world. Ends of the earth. According to chapter 1, verse 8. And this would be embedded into the DNA of the church from its inception.

[14 : 48] God's missional nature. The rest of the book of Acts is a travel log of God and his gospel. Going forth from city to city. And so we have these two men commissioned by the Holy Spirit.

And affirmed by the congregation in Antioch. They were set apart and sent forth. Commissioned. Secondly.

Confronted. They were confronted. The text doesn't give us specifics on how Barnabas and Saul knew to go to Cyprus. It's sensible given that Barnabas is from Cyprus.

He likely had a social network comprised of friends and loved ones. He would have places to stay, food to eat, and friends to see. That's usually how we determine our travel. Where can we live for free, eat for free, and see others that we love.

So off to Cyprus they go. There were already Christians in Cyprus. We know that from chapter 11. Perhaps there was something about Saul the teacher that appealed to Barnabas.

[15 : 55] They were partners in ministry for the past year. When the ministry at Antioch was thriving and flourishing. Barnabas didn't send for one of the original 12.

He sent for Paul. Perhaps recognizing the ability of Paul. Barnabas could have simply said. Hey. Hey Paul. Saul. I should say at this point. I'd love for you to spend some time with some of my friends and loved ones.

Can we go to Cyprus? And off they go. They go to Seleucia. The port city of Antioch. And they set sail for Cyprus. And they arrive on the eastern coast of Cyprus. In Salamis.

And the first thing they do. Luke notes. Is they find their way into the local synagogues. Plural. This would become Saul's pattern for the remainder of the book.

You only have to fast forward. I mean later on this chapter. You'll see it. Repeatedly. As we make our way through the book of Acts. When he landed in the city.

[16:54] He would make a beeline to the local synagogue. A context he would have been familiar with as a Pharisee. It was an optimal starting point. A crowd would have already been assembled. It would be a community familiar with the Hebrew scriptures.

And so that is where Saul and Barnabas began. Interestingly Luke records no additional details. To stop at the synagogues.

He'll give us a deeper look later in this chapter. Instead he wants us to focus in on what happens in Paphos. The Roman capital of Cyprus.

It was established by Rome as its operational headquarters. And its pro-consul Sergius Paulus. Happened. Just so happened. To be the most powerful man.

On the island. He was. Rome's. Representative. Apparently. Apparently Barnabas and Saul were causing a stir.

[17:55] So much so that Sergius Paulus. Being an intelligent man. Being aware of what's happening on his island. Says hey. Something's happening. Because of these guys.

And he summons them in. Summons them into his presence. To hear. Namely. The word of God. This turns out to be a confrontation. Not between Sergius Paulus.

And God's messengers. Rather between. A man named Bar-Jesus. Elemis. The pro-consul's consultant. And God's messengers.

Luke is not specific. How Bar-Jesus seeks to turn the pro-consul away from faith. And perhaps that's it. Luke just wants us. To tell us.

That there is this man. And his efforts. Are doing just that. To turn. The pro-consul away. From faith. He is choosing. Deliberately. To be an obstacle.

[18:52] An impediment. A deliberate wall. Between. Faith. And the pro-consul. We can reason that Bar-Jesus ended up in the pro-consul's court.

Because he was likely economically motivated. He probably was on the pro-consul's payroll. He somehow had earned his ear and trust. So much so.

That he actually has the right to participate in this conversation. And in those days. The intermingling of gods and deities. A lot of times. People in power would summon.

In their court. These advisors. These spiritual advisors. That they would possibly be gurus. Or magicians. And government leaders.

Would depend on them. To guide. Rule. Help. And tap into the spiritual world. Elemis. Was one of these characters. Luke has given us a portrait of him.

[19:47] He is Jewish by descent. He is false. In terms of a false prophet. And he is a practicing magician. Forbidden. By the Old Testament.

And Saul now emerges to the forefront of the narrative. He is not given a new name. Rather he has likely had multiple names. And now he is called Paul. Saul was a familiar name in Jewish settings.

And all of a sudden now. As he is in these contexts. He takes on his other name. Paul. A Roman name. In Gentile and Roman settings. In the same way.

He has been set apart. By the Holy Spirit. According to verse 2. In the same way. He has been sent out. By the Holy Spirit. According to verse 4.

All of a sudden. He is filled. With the Holy Spirit. According. To verse 9. And Paul. Confronts.

[20:46] The magician. He declares him to be the son of the devil. Which is contrary to the meaning of his name. Which means. He is the son of Joshua. The son of Jesus. He is an enemy of all righteousness.

Full of deceit and villainy. Moreover. He is one who makes crooked. The same word is there. Used to seeking to turn. And to make crooked. Are the exact same word. The straight paths of the Lord. And immediately. He is struck with blindness. That comes from the hand of the Lord. Or blinded. Unable to see the son. Groping in darkness. Needing others to lead him. The one who tried to thwart the word of God.

Has come upon the judgment of God. He is actually the exact opposite. Of Paul. See. Elemis was a false prophet. Paul was a true prophet. Paul was a proponent of righteousness and truth. And Elemis was an enemy of righteousness. And full of deceit. And Paul is seeking to make straight. The paths of the Lord. And Elemis is making crooked.

[21 : 48] These paths. He is not simply name calling. He is actually boldly rebuking. He is pronouncing judgment. Bar Jesus is not really the son of Jesus.

Rather he is the son of the devil. Meaning he imitates. His father the devil. In the world of the Bible. The father son relationship. Was one of imitation.

If you are a parent. You will know that. Children love to imitate their parents. For good and for bad. But it was also one of imitation. Based on vocation.

And so if your father was a carpenter. You would likely be a carpenter. If your father was a leather worker. You would likely be a leather worker. Jesus on several occasions.

Communicated just like this. He said I can't do that. Because I only do what I see my father doing. It is a relationship of imitation. Elemis is imitating his father.

[22 : 47] Namely the devil. The devil is deceptive. He seeks to deter from truth. And to keep people in darkness. Well we see the sign demonstrated.

It results in. It's divine judgment on Elemis. And it's blindness. He is made blind. And he's therefore in darkness. And these are not unfamiliar curses. We find in the Bible.

The men in Sodom are struck with blindness. So that the people inside could be. Inside the home could be spared. The ninth plague that fell upon Egypt. Was darkness. So these.

These. These curses are not surprising to us. And now Elemis. Who has. Been blinding. Trying to blind. Sergius Paulus.

Is now blinded. himself. And here we have. Under God's spirit. Paul. Blinding. A man.

[23 : 44] There's certainly irony here. Paul strikes an enemy of the gospel. With blindness. In the same way that he himself. Was struck. With blindness. When he was an enemy of God.

One writer puts it so vividly. Paul judges. His former. Self. His irony. At its best. Paul is pronouncing judgment. On who he once was.

What he formerly advocated. Now he. Officially. Condemned. It's a verification. Of the legitimacy. Of his conversion.

How can you be sure. That you are a child of God. That which. You once advocated. For. You now condemn. That's how you know.

That's how Paul demonstrates. And Paul comes to the forefront. Of the narrative. He's the chief human actor. Now. For the rest of the book. And.

[24 : 42] This. Is. His. First. Miracle. Think of it. It's bizarre. Isn't it? Is it even a miracle?

It's kind of an anti-miracle. Isn't it? Because Paul would be. Oh. I would think. Man. Peter. He healed someone. Who was lame from birth.

40 years old. People tried to get into his shadow. Just to be healed. And here I am. Paul. Striking someone. Blind. we're expecting the lame to walk the sick to be healed demons outcasted we expect human suffering to be alleviated we are familiar with the blind seeing but how come all of a sudden we get an episode of a seen man made blind how are you to make sense of this well we would be imbalanced bible readers if we neglect the reality of divine judgment the gospels are laden with jesus foretelling the impending judgment he assures people that unless they repent they will perish and though jesus himself to my recollection does not perform any anti-miracle he did talk about it consistently in acts we have begun to actually see judgment actualized you saw ananias and sapphire they are a demonstration of the judgment of god because they lied to the spirit of god in previous weeks in chapter 12 we saw the royal herod struck down for taking glory that didn't belong to himself but i would even make the argument that it was a case of divine vengeance that herod agrippa the first put to death james the brother of john one of the twelve and the apostles weren't able to exact vengeance and the lord said judgment is mine i'll take care of it so he puts herod to death and judgment is now a tangible reality in the life of the church and actually foreshadows what is about to come or what will come and if you are unsure of judgment before the bible is reminding us in this passage of its certainty and its imminence for elemis his life does not cease rather his sight is just taken for a time almost as if during the time that he's blind he could actually reconsider which side he is on but what is most fascinating about this episode is that the proconsul comes to faith after witnessing what happens he is astonished according to verse 12

about the teaching of the lord the word the preached word is authenticated by a sign the word preached gives meaning to the sign performed the holy spirit vindicates the word that is preached and the word will vindicate the spirit we are to be a people of book and a people of spirit we are concerned with both the word what the word has revealed and concerned with what the spirit is doing the christian life is learning to use both our head and our heart and this morning we see the record of how god works in our world he works by his spirit through his word via the medium of people we are vessels accompanied by god's spirit and god's word god's word is provided to us in the bible god's spirit is provided to us as a gift in promise demonstrating himself supernaturally this is what paul and barnabas are given they weren't given a program they weren't given new technology they weren't given fancy gimmicks or tricks or a large building they were given just the spirit and just the word and guess what that's what you and i have and know this it is enough it is sufficient it is adequate you want to stand between before princes or paupers take the word endowed by the spirit and you can do both it is sufficient well what are we to make of this sign then judgment falls on elements and the result is the belief of sergius paulus the proconsul elements is struck blind so that the proconsul could see salvation for the proconsul comes at the expense of another follow closely one author has boldly asserted that salvation always comes through judgment it is the biblical pattern Israel was delivered while Pharaoh and Egypt were plagued Goliath was slain so that God's people could dwell securely God is glorified in redemption and it always comes at the expense of the judgment of the guilty this is how you and I know that we have received redemption is it not our salvation my salvation our redemption has come at the expense of another well that judgment came upon not a guilty party but an innocent party namely Jesus as judgment fell on the son of God darkness blindness blinded the earth I went back and read it let me just read how Luke records the moment of Jesus' death it was now about the sixth hour noon and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour and catch this phrase while the sun's light failed it is as if the sun itself did not know what to do as she witnessed the death of her creator the world the earth itself went blind Jesus smitten by God afflicted cut off stricken for the transgressions of others crushed the prophet tells us as his soul makes an offering for guilt this is salvation through substitution this is the victory over evil as it is conquered in judgment judgment on elements is merely a sign pointing to the judgment on Jesus it is not the judgment of elements that leads to the belief of the proconsul it is not that is not what [31 : 51] I'm certain that's not what Paul and Barnabas were talking about it is judgment on the eternal son of God that led to his belief and later on his astonishment that was certainly the teaching of the Lord in verse 12 this is the kingdom of God triumphing over the kingdoms of this world Sergius Paul a servant of Caesar in Rome had just become a servant of Christ and little could Caesar anticipate that his empire was being conquered and it wasn't coming through the bloodshed of violent militant violent militants but it was coming through the blood spilt through the vicarious the substitutionary suffering of God's servant Jesus wow salvation through judgment is what we've received in Christ

Father we we may stand here and say that's unjust that's not right that's not fair and it is not how how does a man namely the son of man the son of God receive punishment that is due to us and in doing so the guilty may run free and that is the conquering power of the gospel it is the power of the cross the Christian faith is not one of many faiths it is one that stands over all faiths just because we coexist does not mean we are co-equal that Father you have lifted up your son above all else that at his name all of heaven and earth will bow and so

Father would you exalt your son in our lives would you exalt your son in our minds and in our hearts that we would live in such a way that we would be heralds of this news the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ and Father we pray as we sing these truths would become further fortified in our hearts we ask these things in Jesus name Amen Amen