

Acts 13:1-12 "Speaking to an Upside Down World"

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[0 : 0 0] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah. It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Father, we ask that you would continue to gently but deeply pour out the Holy Spirit upon us. We ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would move very deeply in us, that we might know that we are in your presence, that you are a great God, that Jesus is a great Savior, able to save all who put their faith and trust in Him, that you will help us to grow in knowing that the gates of hell will not prevail against your church, and that even if we are weak, you are strong. So Father, we ask that you would do a gentle but powerful work in our hearts this morning, bringing your word home to us in a deep way. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Please be seated. So a couple of years ago, probably more than a couple of years ago, I was taking the cab to the airport early morning, and I was going to some pastors' conference. And this is a different cab conversation than last Sunday's sermon, just in case you're wondering. The cab driver asked me why I was going to the airport so early where I was going. I told him I was going to Vancouver. I told him, he said, oh, why? I said, I'm going to a pastor's conference, meet with other pastors. And he looked at me through his mirror, and he started to pepper me with some standard Muslim critiques of Christianity, about the Bible being corrupted, and a few other things like that. And I'd had a bit of experience in handling some of those things.

I was able to parry them, you know, give some answers. And then he sort of paused, especially after one of them when he talked about the Bible. And I said, well, that's actually not correct. Anyway, he paused, and I said, so I take it you're a Muslim. I said, are you a practicing Muslim? He said, I was a very, very devout Muslim for quite a few years. But then a couple of years ago, I realized that nothing written in the 7th century can have anything relevant to life today. Sort of interesting that he was trying to get me to stop being a Christian. That's what he said, nothing written in the 7th century can have any relevance to life today. And then he told me this other little detail.

[3 : 2 7] He said, when I said that to my mom, she's still sad over it, because I live a different way now. The reason I mention this is it's, as you know, there's many, there's always been people who walk away from the Christian faith. And one of the things which contributes to people walking away from the Christian faith is the great disconnect between what we do on a Sunday morning, where what we do when we're with our Christian friends, and what happens when we walk out the door. And there's ways of, talking about what it means to be a Christian, and there's ways of looking at the Bible, that are all, they can make us feel very comfortable, and they can make us feel very safe.

And by the way, I like people feeling comfortable. I like feeling comfortable. But if we talk about things in certain type of way, almost ignoring how the world, how the doors out, people on the other side of those doors, how they would look at the same text.

If we only talk about it in here with our in-house language, and never sort of connect what's outside that door with what's going on inside, it will make it harder to be a Christian.

And in fact, it could even end up leading you to the conclusion that nothing written in the, in this case, first century, has anything to say to life in this century. So one of the things you can pray for me is that week by week, when I try to open the word, and when other people like Steve open the word, that we'll be, we want to have the two worlds come together. Because the fact of the matter is, Jesus really is the hope of the world.

There is no other hope. He is the hope of the world. So let's look at this text in light of what I've just said, because I think you'll see why I brought this up as an analogy. So if you turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter 13, Luke chapter 13, and by the way, I can't see what you're seeing on the screen. So if those of you who are watching this, maybe it's a sermon later, our service got delayed earlier because we were having trouble with pro-presenter.

[5 : 28] So I don't know if periodically you're just going to see a big pro-presenter advertisement rather than me when I preach, and that's just, we'll fix the glitch next week. That's all I can say.

Anyway, Luke chapter 13, I'm sorry, Acts chapter 13, not Luke, Acts chapter 13, sorry. You see, I'm going to talk about sorcery. All sorts of things start to go wrong, you know, but it won't work, by the way. Christ is one, and we all know the end of the story.

So Acts chapter 13, and here's, and actually before I go any further, you know, here's the thing that the text is going to be about today, and you'll see why I'm using this as an analogy and example at the beginning. What we're looking at today is the first true missionary journey.

The first true missionary journey. So up until now, the book of Acts is an eyewitness-based history of the first 30 or so years of the Jesus movement, and it was written while eyewitnesses were still alive to critique it, and up until now, obviously there's been the Gospels making big jumps out of the Jewish community into the Samaritan community, out of the Jewish community into the pagan world. It's left Jerusalem. The story's going to take place in Antioch. Antioch's the third most important city of the Roman Empire at that particular time. It's a very, very important city. The third biggest as well. And so the Gospel's been doing this, but it's in a sense all been done informally. People leaving and gossiping the Gospel. I can't remember who invented that phrase. It wasn't me, but gossiping the Gospel. But what we're going to look at today is the first missionary endeavor, where there's a conscious decision made to send missionaries out, and with financial and prayer support, the very, very first time. So here's the problem.

Outside the door. Outside the door, we learn to decolonize our minds. That's what they want to teach you in school, don't they? The problem in the world is that there's been this terrible movement of colonization. There's been these terrible, terrible people called missionaries. No offense, I know there's at least one missionary in the room. No offense to you, but that's how the world speaks about missionaries. Missionary activity, in principle, is wrong. It's narrow-minded, implying that Jesus is the only way. It, in fact, is trampling on the indigenous and other types of spiritualities which exist in the world, and it tramples on them, and it's a form of colonizing which we need to rid ourselves of if we want to flourish. That's what they say out there, right? Tell me I'm wrong. Well, maybe not right now, but later on. Send me an email. But that's how the world understands this, and so here we are looking at a text. Christians, at least orthodox Bible-believing Christians, think missionaries are good guys. Out there, they think missionaries are bad guys. So we have to read the text putting those two things together, putting those two things together. So how does this story go? And we'll talk about it a little bit more as we get into it to see the power of the story.

[8 : 48] And it begins in chapter 13, verse 1. It goes like this. Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers. It's the only place in the New Testament where it talks about the church being led by prophets and teachers. Nothing else is said about it. It's usually presbyters or elders that are in charge of churches. Nobody knows why, but that's just the term that's used. And when it says the church in Antioch, we can't think of it, nothing personal against my Baptist friends, we can't think of it like Baptists think of it. They wouldn't have had, there would have been way more Christians in this room would hold, and there weren't many houses with rooms this big. So it would have been a whole pile of churches. It would have been more like a community of local churches. So when they're using, a lot of times in the New Testament, when they use words like the church in a city, what you really need to think of is there's a whole lot of church, small churches, but there, and each one of them is a church, but the bigger group is also a church, okay? Just so you understand what's going on. So there's a group of people looking over the, all of the, in a sense, the Christian movement in Antioch. They're called prophets and teachers, back to the text, and here's the names of the five of them. There's five of them.

Now, there's lots of interesting things which are going on in here, but I want to give you, and I apologize. I thought I had, I thought I had made these points to send to Clara, and then I discovered that I hadn't written them down and sent them to her in advance. So there's no point up on the screen.

That's all on me, but here's a big idea, and it's a big idea for all of the book of Acts, and it's a big idea in terms of how you're going to understand why missionaries are a good thing, Christian missionaries are a good thing. What Jesus did to save you is not narrow because it is cramped and weak. It is narrow by being utterly unique and utterly huge. I'll say it again. What Jesus did to save you is not narrow because it is cramped and weak. It is narrow by being utterly unique and utterly huge. You know what the best example of it is? It would be as if people say it's awfully narrow-minded to think that this solar gap, this solar, this solar system should only have one sun. You'd go. I mean, if you even said something like that, it would mean you don't know anything at all about physics or astronomy or anything like that. If you added a second sun, you wouldn't have our solar system. Everything would end.

And the fact of the matter is, just having one sun for our solar system, as I said, it isn't a problem. There's a really interesting book that just came out, the 20th anniversary edition. I haven't read the book, but I've watched two very long interviews about the book. It's called *The Privileged Planet*, written by, I can't remember what the first guy's scientific specialty was. The other one is an astronomer. It sounds like a fascinating book, and they've rewritten it or updated it for the 20th anniversary of it. But the fact of the matter is, is the sun is utterly unique and utterly huge and everything our solar system needs. And that's the same claim that's been made by Christians about the gospel. That what Jesus did for us on the cross is like to the human race what the sun is to the solar system. It's utterly unique and it's utterly huge and it provides everything that's needed for our solar system to thrive and for us to live and thrive. Not narrow and cramped. I mean, you just think about it for a second. This is the fundamental Christian claim. This is, you know, later on it's going to talk about how Paul goes everywhere talking about the Word of God and all, and that's a short form in a sense for saying that what he does is he talks about the Word made flesh by opening the Word of God. So he opens the Word of God to talk about the Word made flesh. And that all gets you that the message of the gospel is that God, the Son of God, has done something absolutely huge. That the Father, the Son, and the

Holy Spirit, three persons, one God, a union of love and fellowship and communion, and they look at the human race, they look at human beings made in the image of God, and they see that we have gone completely and utterly astray. That while we do some good things at the very, very center of who we are, we think that we can all individually be the sun at the center of a solar system. And that, of course, just constantly causes chaos and messes up families and relationships and churches and governments and communities and nations because you can't have everybody being the sun with all the planets revolving around them. If Louise and I both think we're the sun, we are always going to be in conflict. And so that God, the Father, God, the Son, God, the Holy Spirit, they look down at human race, they see that there is this huge need, they see that we cannot save ourselves from this. And so God does a rescue mission. God, the Father,

[14:15] God, the Son, God, the Holy Spirit, three persons, one God, a union of love, a communion of love, they do something to rescue us. And God, the Son of God, sets aside his glory, sets aside his splendor, sets aside his prerogatives of God, sets aside his using the power of God, but still remains God and takes into himself our human nature and descends, descends into becoming a zygote in the womb of Mary.

What a remarkable idea. What a remarkable story. He humbled himself to become a zygote. And as a zygote, he then goes through the normal nine-month gestation period that human beings go through. He goes through a normal birth. He has a mother and a father. He eventually has brothers and sisters. He has cousins and nephews. He lives in a town. He works with his hands, and he learns language. He works with his hands in his father's business. He has to bury his dad by the time his ministry begins. He spends this three years of teaching and letting people know that the promises, the ancient promises that God had been making for thousands of years, that he would send a deliverer, that he is that answer to those promises, that God has kept his word. He lives a completely human life. He suffers the trials and temptations that we suffer, only he doesn't sin. And then he goes and willingly allows himself to die on a cross. And if you go and you read the gospel stories, it's so completely and utterly mind-boggling. It's something which should gobsmack you,

that the one that if those ancient eyewitness biographies are true, and they claim to be eyewitness biographies written when eyewitnesses were still alive, the man who could calm the sea, the man who could walk on water, the man who could heal the sick, the man who could raise the dead, allows himself to be captured. And it is not the nails that hold him to the cross. It is his love for you and me that holds him to the cross. And he dies in my place and in your place to reconcile us to God. And he takes all there is to taste of death. He's buried. He's put in a tomb.

So this descent, God, the Son of God, his descent to being a zygote, his descent to human life, and his deeper descent into tasting all there is to taste of death. He descends and he descends and he descends all to save you. And then there is the ascent. On the third day, the stone is pushed away from the grave, not by any human power, but by the power of God. The grave clothes are left behind. Jesus rises physically from the dead, and his body is never found. And over the next 40 days, he appears alive to many people in many places in many ways to show that he is completely and utterly alive, that he has defeated death. He has tasted all there is to taste of death. He does not have a near-death experience.

He is not like people that we might know who die, who enter into the place of dead and come to this side of death, only to have to die again. He tastes all there is to taste of death. He emerges on the far side of death. Death is now defeated, and that which causes death, which is a rebellion against God, our desire to be the Son in every human relationship, that is completely and utterly defeated. The price has been paid. Our sins are forgiven, and he ascends into heaven, and this whole mighty act of God to save us, his descent, his ascent, and of course we have his promise of the coming again. And that is utterly unique and utterly huge. And it is huge enough for every human being.

[18:28] Now why am I saying that at the beginning of the story? Well, not only because you need to remember this throughout the entire rest of the book of Acts, but you already see the hugeness of it to broach and break all sorts of social and racial and language categories. If you just look at the five names here, this is where you get it from. Look at the names again. Verse 1. Who's Barnabas? Barnabas is a rich land-owning Jewish man who becomes a Christian. Who is Simeon? Simeon, who is called Niger, he's somebody from Africa. He's black. These are the leaders of the church. How the gospel is huge enough to affect a person who is from Africa, sub-Saharan Africa we would now call, and he's also someone who is, somebody is already there who's a rich Jewish man, Lucius of Cyrene. Do we have any Syrians present? He's a Syrian.

And then we have Manan, a member of the court of Herod the Tetrarch. Herod the Tetrarch was not a Jewish man, but we have somebody who is of a very type of secular, rich, powerful Jewish family who has become a Christian. And then last of all is mentioned Saul, who we now know primarily is the name of Paul.

And we now know in hindsight how important a person Paul is, but back then he lost everything by becoming a Christian. There's evidence from his letters that he was completely and utterly disinherited and lost all contact with his family when he gave his life to Christ.

And in the ancient world he is poorer than poor. What Jesus did for us on the cross is big enough to encompass this very highly educated but now impoverished man, a wealthy man, a person with connections to the court, somebody from Syria, somebody from sub-Saharan Africa. And that's the leadership of the church.

See, what Jesus did is huge. What he has done for us is sufficient for every sort of human being. Some other time, because it's going to come up again, we'll talk a little bit about how it is, but you'll see that what happens is in this part that we just read is that the Holy Spirit propels them to begin this missionary journey. And if you look again at just verse 3, then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. You see, there's a very conscious, there would have been financial provision, and there would have just been their blessing, and there would have been their prayer support, they would have been pledging their ongoing koinonia with them in this very, very first missionary journey. And now we get the account of the beginning of the Christian missionary encounter with the pagan world. I'm going to ask you once again, friends, brothers and sisters, could you pray, would you join me in praying that God would in his kindness empower the Christian church today to have a new missionary encounter with Canada?

[21:50] Pray that God will have mercy on our nation and allow us to have a new missionary encounter with our land. So what happens? Well, this is even a bigger problem, this next bit that I'm going to go to.

It's going to show, yeah, I think hopefully you can get to see, I'm going to talk some other week a bit more about why it's completely reasonable to believe that Jesus is the only way. But you'll see here the fundamental Christian claim. It's going to be torn out time and time and time again. The gospel is not narrow because it's weak and cramped. It's utterly unique and utterly huge and utterly all that anybody needs.

Well, here we go with this very first story. Look at what happens, verse 4. So being sent out by the Holy Spirit, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. Seleucia is a port and they sailed to Cyprus.

When they arrived at Salamis, which is the port in Cyprus, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jewish people and they had John to assist them. And just an aside, if you go reading a little bit earlier, you'll see that John is the person we primarily know of as Mark.

And he's the one who wrote the gospel of Mark. Okay, so they had John to assist them. When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, and just pause there, in the original language it implies that they didn't just sort of go for a trip, like a hike, that they went and they preached as they went, told people about Jesus.

[23 : 33] So verse 6 again, when they had gone through the whole of the island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician. Now, it's a bit of an unfortunate translation in the ESV.

I think a couple of times I said, sometimes the ESV is a bit too precise. And if you look, there's another sense of magician.

But the better word, and I'm going to say this when I read it from now on, it's a better word is to say sorcerer. So they're not talking about a person who'd get a show at Las Vegas.

They're talking about a person who deals with dark powers, who deals with potions and rituals and draws down, claims to draw down, and does powerful forces, which we would understand to be demonic, and has potions and spells, and gives power to amulets and all of that stuff.

So I'll read it again. They came upon a certain sorcerer, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus. That means he's called himself a prophet. He calls himself the son of salvation.

[24 : 47] And he was with the pro-council, and the pro-council is the head of a Roman province. So he's a very big deal. And he was with, and when it says here he was with, it means that he's part of his team of advisors.

He's a key advisor. So Bar-Jesus claims to be a prophet, and claims to be a son of salvation. He is a sorcerer as well, and he's one of the key advisors to Sergius Paulus.

And then it continues, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul, and sought to hear the word of God. Now just sort of pause here for a second. There's a couple of things that we need to do to understand what's going on in this story, and to be able to experience the story emotionally.

So first I'm going to give like another point, a bit of a bigger point, which I wish it was up, but I forgot to email it. In a sense, one of the things that's at the heart of this whole story is that God calls us to go in weakness to an upside-down world with demonic opposition that has, you know, an upside-down world that has demonic opposition to us.

I'd have to word it better. Go in weakness to an upside-down world with demonic opposition, and bear witness to Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. That's in a sense the message.

[26 : 13] Now why do I say it's an upside-down world? Once again, think of the difference between us and when you go through the door. How do we start to enter into this? Well, here's the first one.

Imagine you get invited to a party in your neighbourhood, maybe with your work. You know, maybe you work for some social media network, maybe you work on Parliament Hill, maybe you work for the Civil Service.

Maybe it's just a neighbourhood party, and you get invited to a party, and you happen to go into the party around the same time, or just a little bit before two other people who come in. And they don't come in together. Two, let's say, we'll just say them, two men come in, one after the other.

They're about the same age. And you're just sitting there having a drink, or standing there having a drink, and you can sort of overhear what happens. People come up, and they start to have conversations. And this, we'll do this one over here.

This fellow over here, says to people, and they ask him who he is and what he does. He says, I've decided to become a missionary, and I'm going to go to an unreached people group.

[27 : 14] That means a people group that's never heard anything about Christianity. I've decided I'm going to be a missionary to go to a group of people who've never heard of Jesus at all. Okay?

The other person says, they ask him what he does, and he says, I'm a sorcerer.

Now, who's going to have the interested crowd around him? If this guy has a crowd around him, it will be because people want to challenge him for his colonizing, imperialistic, narrow-minded, backwards, ignorant, knuckle-dragging, behavior, and beliefs.

People for that guy, they might be a bit amused, but most of them, they'll be pretty interested in it. What do you do for sorcery? Does it work? Like, oh, could you tell me some spells? That's the real, that's the world we're going out to.

In here, we think that sorcery is spiritually dangerous. because there really are occult powers that only want to hurt you.

That, in fact, if you think you're manipulating these powers for your benefit, the truth is you're only being manipulated by those demonic powers for their benefit.

[28 : 45] And you are being led into greater and greater deception and weakness. That's what we believe. Out there, it's cool. And all the way through the text, you see, in a sense, what the Bible is saying is why is it that often after you've been a Christian for a while, you feel like the world is a bit of a funny place?

Because the Bible wants us to understand that the world is upside down. But they don't think it's upside down.

When I was in the world, I didn't think it was upside down. I thought Christians were weird and completely and utterly unattractive. But Christians think that Jesus came to turn the upside down world upside down, which is another way of saying to turn it right side up.

to understand that prayer is good, casting spells is bad, that openness to the Holy Spirit is good, openness to demonic powers, and they won't call them demonic powers, they'll call them white magic and all that other type of stuff is that they're misnaming them.

We're being asked by God to go to an upside down world. And if we think about it for a second, that's part of the reason why we have a bit of discomfort when we go out into the world is because, in a sense, we're talking to people who are standing upside down on thin air.

[30 : 18] And they look at us and say, why are you walking on the ceiling? And we look at them and say, actually, we're walking on the floor. Why are you standing upside down on thin air?

You can see those can be difficult conversations, awkward conversations, ones that we don't want to maybe even acknowledge are there. We might want to say, well, if you sort of look at it the right way, they're not really standing upside down in thin air.

No, the Bible wants to make it clear that if you live as if there is no God, that's upside down, there is a God. If you live as if you somehow are a little sun in the center of your own solar system, the fact of the matter is you're at best a moon circling one of the planets that circles the sun.

And you won't actually be healthy or whole until you realize you're a moon around a planet going around the sun. You're not the sun. You'll never be the sun.

You'll only start to be less anxious and more happy when you realize you're not the sun. Never will be the sun and being the sun would be bad for you. Good grief. Imagine how terrible it would be for all of you if I was God.

[31 : 28] Let me tell you, that would suck for every single one of you because I can be petty. I can be anxious. I can be filled with fears. I can be unbelievably judgmental about how people drive and how people shop in Costco as if those things really matter and all sorts of terrible things would happen if I was the sun.

You should all be glad I'm not and brothers and sisters, I don't mean to offend you. I'm glad you're not God either because you would make just as big a mess. Well, no.

Probably I'd make a bigger mess. No, never mind. We won't get into a mess. It's just as to who would make a worse God than either of us. So here's the thing. So the first thing about this story is to understand the dynamics.

And there's the exact same dynamics that are going on here. Right? This is exactly like our world. In their world, all the smart people are fine with sorcerers.

And all the smart people think the idea of God, the Son of God, of the Trinity and the only one. They all think that's wrong. It's upside down and wrong-headed. But that's where Paul has gone to speak.

[32 : 39] And the other thing about it is, we need to remember, is that now we know that Paul is famous. But in Paul's day, Paul is a nobody. And Sergius Paulus is famous and powerful.

And Paul is a weak, poor person who nobody has heard of. And here's the other thing about this story. Paul is going into Sergius Paulus' place.

Sergius Paulus didn't go to visit Paul where he was staying in an inn. Sergius Paulus asked Paul to come into his place where Sergius Paulus is surrounded by his buddies and his advisors.

And in a moment here, we're going to see what... Well, here. Look what happens. Look what happens. This is... And then I'll tell you how to... Okay. Here's how to put it.

Imagine for a second, and I'm going to be politically neutral, you've gotten invited to speak at a place that Trudeau has rented and he has Gerald Butts and Katie Telford with him.

[33 : 49] And you're going to now say these things to Gerald Butts. Politically neutral? Pierre Polyev has invited you to his place and you're going to say what Paul just says right now to Jenny Burns.

Okay? Being politically neutral. Just imagine if you could go in Pierre Polyev's place surrounded by his buddies and you're going to say the following words to Jenny Burns. Or you're in a Trudeau place and you're going to say the following words to Gerald Butts.

If you start to think of it in this way, you'll get nervous. Verse 8. But Eliamis, the magician, the sorcerer, Elias means wise dreamer, for that is the meaning of his name, opposed Paul, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.

but Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at LAMS and said, he looked intently at Jared Butts, he looked intently at Jenny Burns, or pick your, you know, whatever, Elon Musk's personal attendant, or I don't know who owns Facebook nowadays, whoever they're, just think of that, and he says to them, verse 10, 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?

Paul's a nobody, and he just said it to powerful people who can just literally say off with your head, off with your head.

[35 : 40] See, God calls us to go to the upside down world that also has demonic opposition, and he calls us to bear witness to Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, and the point of the text here is this.

The point of the text isn't that Paul is bold. The point of the text is in verse 9. But Saul, who was also called Paul, is filled with the Holy Spirit.

That's the point. God uses weak people like you and me. That's the point. God uses weak people like you and me.

And you never know. It might be a couple of years ago I was... Who's the guy who started the Daily Wire? Is that Ben Stein?

Eh? Ben Shapiro. Ben Shapiro. That's right. Ben Shapiro. A couple of years ago when I was in Israel, it turned out that the hotel beside me, Ben Shapiro, was staying there at the same time.

[36 : 42] Because some of the people who were in the group that I was... One of the people who joined us in the group, he'd been in that hotel, and he actually was in the elevator with Ben Shapiro. So here's the thing.

You nobodies, you never know when you're going to be in the elevator with Ben Shapiro. I was on Parliament Hill and once visiting somebody, I was in the...

I was in an elevator with a couple of captain ministers. Like, you never know when you're going to bump into them at a restaurant or something like that. And you never know when you're going to have a conversation. And if you get a chance to bear witness to Jesus, everything within you and the devil within you is going to tell you not to say anything about Jesus.

But it might... I'm not saying you should, by the way. I'm not saying you should just automatically blot it out. But it... God does things through weak people.

He does things through weak people like you and me. He just asks us to bear witness. Conversion is God's business, not mine. It's his power, not mine. I mean, back in the day, Trump used to walk around when he was building one of his hotels and chat away with construction workers.

[37 : 55] Like, you get a chance to chat with Trump? Tell him about Jesus. Like, that's the astounding thing here in this story.

Don't think of Paul as being... Remember, Paul's a nobody in this particular story. The Lord... The Lord... Take heart. The Lord knows that your weakness, but he is strong even in your weakness.

And it's his strength which matters, not yours. And then it goes on in verse 11. And now, Peter, Paul continues. And by the way, some people think, get mixed up with Saul and Paul.

So Saul is... Saul and Paul are the same person. I just met a couple of weeks ago. In fact, I think she's here again today. I met somebody who's an immigrant from China.

And she told me her Canadian name. And I asked her what her Chinese name was. Right? And I have a hard time pronouncing her Chinese name. But I can pronounce her Canadian name.

[38 : 54] It's a very, very common thing. So a lot of Jewish people had pagan or Roman... They had Roman names as well. So Saul is his Jewish name. And I meant to write this in my notes. I was telling somebody just before this.

I think in Greek, in the language of that time, Saul, if you just hear it said, it sounds a little bit like somebody who waddles and has diarrhea or something like that.

Like it's not an attractive name. So he has a Roman name. And throughout the rest of the book of Acts, he's now in the pagan Roman world. He's always going to go by Paul. But anyway, go back to this.

So verse 11, and now behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you. This is Paul speaking. And you will be blind, unable to see the sun for a time.

He's speaking to Bar-Jesus, Eleamus. And immediately, mist and darkness fell upon Bar-Jesus, Eleamus, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand.

[39 : 51] Then the procouncil believed. Now in our English, it looks as if he believed because he saw what it heard. But what he saw, when he saw what had occurred, that made him pause.

But what he was astonished by wasn't the miracle. He was astonished at the teaching about Jesus. He was astonished that God, the Son of God, would leave heaven to seek him, to save him. that's what he was astonished by. One final thing in closing, for those of you who know your Bibles, or if you were to start to read from the book of Acts at the beginning to now, you'll know that before this, there's one other time when somebody struck blind.

That was Paul. And it was part of his coming to faith in Christ. So the Bible here leaves open-ended. Elymas, Bar-Jesus, comes under God's judgment, but you'll see that even in this judgment, there's an aspect of mercy to it. There's an invitation for him to pause and be astonished by what Jesus has done for him on the cross.

[41 : 11] There is a pause that leads to a hope for conversion. Now, it never tells us whether he's converted or not. And I think that's partly the art of Luke writing the book of Acts to bring before us this great message.

It's repeated three times in the book of Ezekiel. And if you use the old book of common prayer from 1662, actually goes all the way back to the mid-1500s for your morning and evening prayer.

I try to do that every day. It has this wonderful line, God takes no delight in the death of a sinner, but rather that they will turn from their wickedness and live.

And you see this even with the sorcerer. God offers him a chance to repent and come to Christ. Let's stand. Let's stand. Our heads in prayer.

Father, if we're honest with ourselves, there's people that we just think they would never become Christians. In fact, Father, if we're honest, there's people that we don't even want to have become Christians because we like hating them or being angry at them and it would mess our lives up if all of a sudden we had to call them brother or sister in Christ.

[42 : 31] And Father, you know that we're reluctant to confess that because we like to try to pretend we're pious. But Father, you know our hearts. And you know, Father, how often we measure what we do or don't do by our own strength, not knowing that you know that we're weak and that what matters isn't our strength but your strength.

You are the one who is strong and mighty to save. And you know, Father, how we can feel uncomfortable being in an upside-down world beginning through the gospel and your scriptures and our fellowship together in the means of grace to start to understand how to live right-side up in an upside-down world.

But we ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would move in our lives so that we can increasingly with humble confidence and joy in the gospel live right-side up in an upside-down world.

And even in the face of opposition, that in weakness we might recognize those opportunities you give us to bear witness to Jesus. And we thank you, Father, that you take no pleasure or delight in the death of a sinner, that your heart is that we will turn from our wickedness and live.

And we give you thanks and praise those of us who are here who are in Christ. We thank you, Father, that you so moved in our hearts, unworthy as we are, to lead us to Christ.
[43 : 56] And so, Father, we ask and thank all these things in the name of Jesus, your Son, and our Savior, and all God's people say, Amen.