

PM Acts 13:1-12 The Triumph of Light over Darkness

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- [0 : 00] is from Acts chapter 13. I began this morning a new series of studies in Paul's letter to the Colossians.
- And it seems good to start a new series tonight on Paul's missionary journeys. We're going to look tonight just at the first stage of the first journey with Paul's journey to Cyprus.
- Acts 13 and reading verses 1 to 12. 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 worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul, for the work to which I have called them.
- [1 : 22] 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 Elimas, the magician, for that is the meaning of his name, opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.
- [2 : 33] 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.
- We'll look at that passage a little later, but let's now praise God once again. Let's turn then to Acts 13, the first stage of Paul's first missionary journey, to Cyprus.
- I'll read again by way of text, verse 4. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.
- [4 : 22] There are many reasons for studying Paul's missionary journeys. First, of course, it's a cracking good story, as people used to say.

Even here, in just this short passage, you have a magician struck blind, and a Roman official converted.

Later on, you have riots, miracles, an earthquake, and a shipwreck. How can anyone say that the Bible is boring?

This is one of the most exciting stories ever told. Secondly, it's a great encouragement.

What we see here is Christ fulfilling his promise, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

[5 : 33] And what he did then, he is still quite able to do today. Thirdly, it will help us to understand Paul's letters.

This is the background to Paul's letters. As we read how these various churches began, and the struggles that they went through, we will understand why Paul wrote in the way that he did.

Fourthly, it will help us to understand Christian ministry. Paul and his companions are set before us here as an example. Here are Christians, led, motivated, and empowered by the Spirit to preach the Gospel, a great sacrifice to themselves.

And that is still an example to us today. But finally, and perhaps most important, it will help us to understand the Gospel itself.

Not only do we have an account in the book of Acts of what the Apostles preached, but also, each story will open up to us some new perspective on what the Gospel is all about.

[7 : 13] This particular passage tonight will show us the Gospel as a conflict between light and darkness. A conflict in which there can only be one winner.

we'll look at it under three headings. The call in verses 1 to 3, the campaign in verses 4 to 6, and the conflict in verses 6 to 12.

First, the call. Let me read it again. Now, there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers Barnabas, Simeon, who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Mana'an, a lifelong friend of Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul.

While they were worshipping 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 hands on them and sent them off. The church at Antioch was still a very young church.

[8 : 36] It had only existed for a few years. Its origin is described back in chapter 11 and verse 19, that now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews.

And then some from Cyrene and Cyprus took a big step forward. they began speaking to the Greeks and a great multitude turned to the Lord.

The apostles sent Barnabas to check up if this work was genuine and he stayed on and he taught the church and he brought Saul from Tarsus to help him.

how remarkable that the man who had started that persecution should end up teaching the church that was unintentionally founded because of the persecution.

You see how God can turn all things to good. Saul of course was the arch Pharisee who had persecuted Christians and then been dramatically converted.

[10 : 17] And right from the start God had called him to be a missionary to the Gentiles. Barnabas meanwhile was a Levite from Cyprus and he had gained a reputation for generosity and kindness.

real name was Joseph Barnabas was a nickname meaning son of encouragement. Interesting to see him listed here first among the prophets and teachers at Antioch whilst Saul is last.

In between there are these three others about whom we know virtually nothing. It's interesting how Manan was a lifelong friend of Herod.

Some versions translate it that he was brought up as a foster brother to Herod. Even in those days we see that God had some of his people in high places.

So here they are then five men prophets and teachers worshipping the Lord and fasting and God speaks. Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.

[11 : 39] God had already called them notice he'd already spoken to them personally but now the time had come for that work to begin and the church doesn't hesitate they lay hands on them with prayer and fasting and they send them out two of their very best men this young church many of us wouldn't expect them even to have preachers of their own let alone to be sending anyone out into the mission field but already they have these five prophets and teachers and already they're prepared to part with two of them and send them out to the mission field what an example to us by the way of willingness to give our very best into the work of

God now I love the spiritual vitality of this scene this isn't just a formal committee meeting of the Northwest Presbytery considering proposals for church outreach I don't decry such meetings formal meetings are necessary for the good ordering of the church but this is a worship meeting five men praising God and God speaks with one of the most important commands that has ever been made our Lord had told his disciples back in Acts one that they were to be witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth the last stage had now begun Barnabas and

Saul were to take the gospel to what to them was the ends of the earth I love too the positive approach of this church they're not just looking to consolidate they're looking beyond they're looking out into the world they want to see the world converted now we're not as strong as them of course what we can do is limited but surely we also should be constantly looking outward not inward William Carey said expect great things from God and attempt great things for God so what did they do let's look now at the campaign verses 4 to 6 so being sent out by the

Holy Spirit they went down to Seleucia which is the seaport near to Antioch and from there they sailed to Cyprus when they arrived at Salamis they proclaimed the word of God to the synagogues of the Jews and they had John to assist them and then they went through the island all the way through to Paphos that was the plan simple systematic preaching of the gospel preaching throughout the island from the northeast right through to the southwest that is still the only plan that God approves of today the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ churches can have all sorts of schemes they might dream up all kinds of gimmicks that they might try to get people to come along but the one and only thing that really works and accomplishes

God's purposes is the preaching of the gospel Cyprus was the obvious place to start it was just across the water the mountains of Cyprus were actually visible on a clear day from the coast of Syria Barnabas came from Cyprus there was a large Jewish population in Cyprus and some of the spade work had already been done Christians from Jerusalem had already gone to Cyprus in Acts 11 and men from Cyprus had actually helped to found the church in Antioch so this was in a sense friendly territory I always remember when

[16 : 54] Hannah was young she wanted to be a missionary and one day driving along in the car I was wanting to tell her stories about missionaries and I told her about one of these intrepid men in the 19th century who went to the South Pacific and was eaten by cannibals and I was unaware because I was driving that little Hannah was trembling with fear and afterwards she said daddy can I be a missionary to somewhere nice where the people are already Christians like Switzerland in a sense it was a bit like this here if you're going to go somewhere friendly and nice pop across the sea to Cyprus the synagogue was the obvious place to start although Paul's ultimate mission was to the Gentiles his principle was always to the Jew first and afterward to the

Gentile the Jews were the people who had the scriptures they had the covenants they were the people whom God had been preparing for centuries they were the natural people to begin with and John was the obvious person to assist them this was John Mark who they had brought with them from Jerusalem back in Acts 12 29 and he was actually Barnabas his cousin even so we mustn't imagine that this was an easy mission I've been to Salamis some years ago I wrote a book about Barnabas and my sister treated me to a holiday in old Famagusta which is just along the coast from Salamis there's a monastery there which is said to contain

Barnabas his tomb you can visit the ruins of Salamis and very impressive ruins they are it's a great Roman city with colonnades and theatres you can still walk on the very road where Paul would have walked and as you walk along that road you appreciate that this was a very sophisticated city this was quite a challenge yes the Jews in the synagogues might be ready to receive the word but the Roman citizens all around that was a culture shock but they never doubted the power of the gospel and nor should we we live in a sophisticated world don't we we live in a world that is often very hostile to the gospel but never doubt that the gospel is able to triumph absolutely anywhere in sophisticated

Salmos or in Dumfries or Glasgow or anywhere else but at Paphos they met with serious opposition so let's now look at the conflict verses 6 to 12 at 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 Elemas the magician for that is the meaning of his name opposed them seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith here is a great conflict between light and darkness when we read of

Elemas the magician we we mustn't think of a stage magician pulling rabbits out of hats we know that that's just a trick that's just sleight of hand no here was a man steeped in the occult with real demonic powers and it's so much the worse because he was Jewish and a false prophet he knew the truth and he denied it his name was Bar Jesus literally son of Jesus but he was the very opposite of the real Jesus but he obviously impressed the proconsul and he had a demonic determination to stop the proconsul from hearing the gospel now Paul's words to him might sound harsh but they were inspired by

[22 : 18] God filled with the Holy Spirit he looked intently at him and said you son of the devil you enemy of all unrighteousness full of 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 son for a while harsh words perhaps but they were actually better than he deserved under the law of God under the law a false prophet was to be stoned but there's no talk of stoning here just a temporary blindness and an implied invitation to repent even so it was a severe judgment and it was carried out at once immediately mist and darkness fell on him and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand it's striking isn't it that the punishment for darkness was darkness those who hate the light will be denied the light it's striking also how similar this is to

Peter's encounter with Simon the magician in Acts chapter 8 both apostles had to confront the darkness of the occult and it's striking also how similar this is to what had happened to Paul himself on the road to Damascus he too remember was struck blind and had to be led by the hand into the city but whereas Paul was blinded by a revelation from God Elemas was blinded by a judgment from God whereas Paul saw the glory of Christ and became his servant Elemas felt the wrath of God and was left bewildered whether Elemas ever repented we don't know he vanishes from history but the proconsul was converted verse 12 the proconsul believed when he saw what had occurred for he was astonished by the teaching of the

Lord do you recognize that phrase from anywhere else it happened during our Lord's ministry didn't it when Jesus had been healing the sick it says the people were astonished at the word of the Lord it was the word of power the proconsul is astonished now at the power of Paul's word but he doesn't just believe in Paul as a greater magician he sees the truth and he believes the gospel Elemas had his eyes closed Sergius Paulus had his eyes opened and such a high profile convert may well have encouraged others to hear the word of God also now I'm sure you will have noticed that in the midst of all this

Saul is called Paul for the first time in verse 9 Saul who is also called Paul and from now onwards he is always called Paul no explanation is given something he adopted the name Paul as a Roman name that would help him in his mission to the Gentiles some think that as a Roman citizen he would always have had two names a Hebrew name and a Roman name some think he might even have borrowed the name from Sergius Paulus the name Paul means little and some think it may have been a mark of humility and certainly Paul was a very humble man calls himself the least of the apostles even so from now onwards little Paul takes the lead he's taken the initiative here and from now onwards he will be mentioned first previously it was

Barnabas and Saul now verse 13 it is Paul and his companions he is now the leading character in the book of Acts so here then is the first stage of the first missionary journey and the first great conflict light represented by Paul and the gospel has clashed head on with darkness represented by Elemas and of course the light has triumphed and that in a way is a symbol of the gospel itself when Paul recalls in Acts 26 how Christ had called him to be a minister to the Gentiles he describes it in terms of light and darkness he relates how Christ has said that he was sending him to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of

[28 : 25] Satan to God that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me isn't that exactly what had happened to Sergius Paulus here was an intelligent man who had been taken in by Elemas but but now he is turning from darkness to light believing the gospel and receiving the forgiveness of sins his eyes have been opened and he believes Paul describes the gospel in these same terms in 2 Corinthians 4 and verse 6 for God who said let light shine out of darkness has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ he is drawing a comparison there between the old creation and the new the new creation begins with light shining into the darkness of our sinful souls just before that in 2

Corinthians he describes the God of this world blinding the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ again isn't that exactly what had happened with Sergius Paulus the devil had been using Elemas to blind him to the truth but now the light had shone through we could find many references in Paul's letters to this it's one of his favorite images of the gospel Ephesians 5 8 for example for at one time you were darkness but now you are light in the Lord walk as children of light Colossians 1 12 which we read this morning he has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light he has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved son

Paul didn't invent that imagery of course it was there in the Old Testament Psalm 27 for example the Lord is my light and my salvation or Psalm 43 which we sang oh send thy light forth and thy truth Jesus himself said I am the light of the world whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life John 1 5 we read the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it 1 Peter 2 9 God has called you out of darkness into his glorious light now today there is still that same struggle between light and darkness and conversion today is still the triumph of the light

Elimas might seem to us a rather exotic figure we don't have magicians like that today we might say but look at how much interest there is in the occult today many people believe in horoscopes intelligent people did you notice the way it describes Sergius Paulus here an intelligent man and yet he was taken in by Elimas and we all know intelligent people who are taken in by horoscopes and such things and they need delivering from it and only the light of the gospel can deliver them and it isn't just the occult there are all kinds of darkness in our society today we live in a world where the truth has been gradually shut out of people's lives the windows have been closed so that the light cannot enter the word of

God has been rejected as the mere writings of men the very existence of God has been questioned and even ridiculed all religions are regarded as equal equally right and equally wrong and the result has been moral chaos the ten commandments have been cast aside new ideologies such as wokery have taken its place is that not darkness and intelligent people like Sergius Paulus have been taken in by it all now we're not given the power that Paul had to strike men with blindness as a judgment from God Paul himself by the way only did that once but we are given the same gospel that

[34 : 04] Paul had to preach and that gospel still has its ancient power to deliver people from darkness to light of course our first responsibility is to walk in the light ourselves we need to look into our own hearts is the light of God there if not we need to turn to Christ Paul says in Ephesians awake O sleeper and arise from the dead and Christ shall give you light but if the light of God is in us then we need to shine as light in the world and proclaim the light God promised long ago to send light into this world and he has fulfilled that promise in Christ Isaiah 9 verse 2 the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness on them light has shone

Matthew applies that to Christ's ministry in Galilee we could apply it to Paul's ministry in Cyprus but may that same light shine in Dumfries today and throughout Scotland and throughout the world Amen Amen Hall let go to Hú