

Cyprus - Conflict and Victory

by Erlo Stegen

The sermon explores the historical and spiritual significance of Cyprus, highlighting the conflict between the gospel and darkness, and the victory of God's power through unity and boldness in faith.

Duration: 1:01:44

Scripture: Acts 13:2-52

Topics: "Victory"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of listening to God's words and not minimizing or softening their impact. He encourages the audience to agree with what God says, even if it involves strong language or judgment. The preacher uses the example of the apostle Paul encountering a sorcerer who opposed the gospel, highlighting the need to allow God's anger to work in our lives in order to experience His deep love and transformation. The sermon concludes with a prayer for God's power to deliver and transform, and a request for His presence in the lives of those preaching the gospel around the world.

Transcript

about God's working in a little, remotely known place called Cyprus. If you're a person who listens to the news, you'll note that Cyprus has been in the news for a few weeks, culminating in yesterday, where there was a great, big, controversial vote and I won't go into it, but Cyprus is very much in the news at the moment. It's been in the news for thousands of years.

The Hittites colonized it. So did the Romans, and our story takes place during this time. So did Europe and the Crusaders take it.

It used to be, by the way, a certain part of it used to be known as the place where the goddess of love, Aphrodite was born. Until the gospel was victorious, and we're going to look today at one of the victories. Until the gospel was victorious, this cult of Aphrodite, of sexual immorality ruled supreme.

And then in 1570, the Muslims took over Cyprus and it was called part of the Ottoman Empire. For the next 500 years, virtually, the Muslims reigned, and until today, you get a northern Islamic area of Cyprus. Bear with me if I give you some geographical and historical details.

Because after all, I am a geography and history teacher, so just, it's in my blood. The truth is you can't understand the present if you don't understand the past. I'm giving this information because we're going to

get to a very interesting story that will happen in Acts chapter 13.

Cyprus means copper. It comes from the Greek word which is pronounced cupros. If you know a little bit of Middle Eastern geography, you'll know that on the far northeastern side, that's south of Turkey, west of Syria, is this little island called Cyprus.

It's very small. The total length of it is only to Durban and back. It's only about 100 kilometers wide.

We're going to enjoy a story and what we can learn for today in our era from this. Let's start in verse 1 of Acts chapter 13. Now in the church that was at Antioch, I remember Antioch was to the east of Cyprus.

That was where the Christians were first called Christians. There were certain prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon, who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manan, who had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul. And they ministered to the Lord and fasted.

The Holy Spirit said, Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then having fasted and prayed and laid hands on them, they sent them away. So being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

Now let's hold on there for a minute. I haven't yet got to the crux of the matter and that is the conflict between light and darkness and God's victory. I'm getting there, but on the way, let's notice a few things together.

And I'm going to ask, I'm going to plead for your attention to listen carefully. I'm not going to stretch this out very long. Some of the details are just factual, but there will be meat for you to eat.

There will be food for your soul. So whether you're saying, I really didn't want to be here, or Lord, speak to me, and wherever you are in between, open now your heart to the Lord to speak to you. Let's look at the composition of the leadership of this church, this group that while they were praying and fasting felt that the Holy Spirit was saying, now set aside this team to go overseas.

These were leading men, we've read in verse 1, these were prophets and teachers, they spoke the word of God, they taught God's word. Firstly, there's Barnabas. Barnabas was a Cypriot, he was born in Cyprus.

That is perhaps, by the way, why the group makes their way to Cyprus. They knew a bit about it, as well as John Mark, they had contacts there. That was just the way that was easy to arrange.

Then secondly, it says Simeon, who was also called Niger. That means Simeon the Black. He was a man of dark complexion and there are different commentaries that they refer to him as an African.

There is a church tradition, and I don't say that this is fact, we're not sure, but there's a tradition that this is the same Simeon who was made to carry the cross of Jesus, and he stayed as a believer. He was known there as Simon of Cyrene, of African descent, and he's referred to there in Luke 23, 26, in case you're making notes, don't turn to it now. But also interesting, it's referred to him as having sons who seemed to be godly men.

Their names were Rufus and Alexander, and you find that in Mark 15, verse 21. Then another African was the leader, his name was Lucius, and he was from Cyrene. And then there was a man called Manan.

Do you know much about Manan? Let's get to know him better here. In case you get to heaven, and he introduces himself and you say, Manan, who? Now, Manan was brought up as a half-brother of Herod. As it says here in verse 1, it also refers to him in the Gospels, in Luke 13, verse 32, it refers to that Herod as that fox.

Yes, it was that same fox that arranged for the beheading of John the Baptist. He was also the Herod that had to do with the allowing to happen of the death, the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, Manan grew up in the same household as this Herod, they grew up as little boys.

Isn't it interesting that history should remember one as being a man of God who laid hands on Paul and Barnabas to commission them. The other one is remembered forever as a man of blood. And then it refers also in verse 1 to Saul.

It is in this chapter 13, by the way, that Saul begins to get known as Paul. As we read in verse 9, it says then, Saul who is also called Paul. You see, Saul, this was his Hebrew name.

And when he preached to the Hebrews, it was quite alright for him to use the name, he mostly was called Saul. But when he was going out now to the Gentiles, to the Roman Empire, he began to use his Roman name, which was of Greek origin, his Roman name was Paul. And from now on, this is what he's called.

Now, we haven't yet got to Cyprus, but let's learn some lessons here. Look at this living church, made up of people from completely different ethnic, racial and cultural backgrounds. From strict Jews, to African Jews, to pagan people who grew up in the palace of wickedness under Roman influence.

It didn't matter now about their backgrounds, it's mentioned by the way, because what really matters is that they part now of a much more important group. And that is the people of God, the church. You know, if you are truly part of God's people, you will forget and or you'll put aside, so to say, what your background and culture and race might be.

You'll forget if you are of royalty, like Manayan. Because in Jesus, there is no Jew, no Greek. Another little point that we can learn on the way, is that Saul, to be called Paul, did in unity what the body agreed on.

He didn't act as a lone ranger. As we hear in verse 2, it was in prayer, it was in faith, it was in unity. It was in fellowship, it was in unity that there was agreement together, where the Lord showed them, and it doesn't describe how, but it says here, separate for me these two men to go and preach now overseas.

This was the first sort of overseas mission. Notice in verse 3 that these men, so there are all these different men, these leading men that we've looked at in verse 1, laid hands now on this team. In other words, they were uniting themselves to it.

They were saying, you go, but we go with you, with the Lord. Notice the holiness of this work. Because it says in verse 2, the Holy Spirit said, separate for me.

You see, God cannot use the one who's devoted to something else, anything that fights for competition in his life. He demands that his people should be separated for him. Now, we get to the heart of the matter, and I'm going to now just look at two or three main characters here.

It's quite a simple story, we read that from verse 5. But I think I'll start in verse 6. So they've arrived, they've started preaching in the synagogues, as it says in verse 5, and then... They walked, and it was well

over a hundred kilometers where they had to walk from Selamis, which was more in sort of central eastern side, and then walked to the southwestern side to the city of Paphos. This was the very center of the goddess, some say this is where Venus comes from. This was the place where sexual immorality, there was an atmosphere that was tangible of sexual looseness in the city.

Let's just take it bit by bit. Now, when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-Jesus. Who was with the proconsul, Sir Gaius Paulus, an intelligent man.

This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elimus, the sorcerer, for so his name is translated, withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Then Saul, who is also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, O fool of deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, you will not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord.

And now indeed the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time. And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

Now this is going to be the first time on the island of Cyprus that Paul and his group are going to have a major conflict. Don't think that when the wind blows smoothly and things are going nicely for you that it will always be the same. Neither be discouraged when it seems to be stormy and difficult and it's tough and it seems like they will never blow smoothly again.

God's work is not changed by the winds of change. Under any government, under any dispensation, those friendly and those not friendly, it doesn't matter. God does his work.

And now the winds of resistance are about to start. Spurgeon says this, wherever there is likely to be a great success, the open door and the opposing adversaries will be found. If there are no adversaries, you may fear that there will be no success.

A boy cannot get his kite up without wind, nor without a wind which drives against his kite. So this was a situation unknown to Paul and his team until that time that with this political leader was a close advisor and he was an evil, wicked man. The Bible speaks of him as being a false prophet.

He was also a Jew, but he was a man who had gone into occultic Jewish beliefs. His name was Bar-Jesus, which means the son of Jesus. But like we've often said, having a nice name doesn't make you a nice person.

Because in a very short time, Paul is going to call him, you son of the devil. You see, this man called Bar-Jesus, his real name being Elemis, he was a man who liked to mix everything in order to impress others. And through it, he got his income.

This was his way to earn money. Now in those days, pagan emperors and kings, their advisors were not just political advisors, they were sometimes seers, those who had to do with the occult, those who could seemingly look into the future. They were people who had demonic influence.

Remember even under the time of Nebuchadnezzar, he had his dream interpreters, he had his astrologers, he had his so-called wise men. So Elemis was on the payroll of the state. He would do his prophetic and magical things for a small fee of course.

Now when he just began to hear what Paul and them were saying, there was a resistance which welled up from deep inside him. And automatically, beyond his control, he just blurted out with a venom. If you have anything to do with any occult powers, you'll find that there's a hardness and a resistance against the Lord Jesus, against the gospel, that will just swell, it will just come up within you, and you won't know where it comes from, but there will be a fierce, hard resistance from inside you.

Now Peter, the apostle, had a similar experience when he was preaching to the Jews as he went out to Samaria. Remember they were commissioned to preach in Jerusalem, Judea, then Samaria, then to the outermost parts of the world. Well when they got to Samaria, there was also a false prophet, his name was Simon Magus.

There was also a conflict of power. Now, at the very time when God the Holy Spirit was working on this political leader, this pro-consul, and his heart was softening, and being drawn, strangely, to what these men had to say about a saviour. At that same time, this man, Bar-Jesus, this elemus, he decided, well, enough is enough, I better speak the truth.

And he spoke it as he knew it. Now Peter, the apostle, had a similar experience when he was preaching to the Jews as he went out to Samaria. Remember they were commissioned to preach in Jerusalem, Judea, then to the outermost parts of the world.

He was the psychic hotline for information, and his job was being threatened. Like you'll find that sometimes soccer teams will go to a well-known witch doctor to ask about who's going to win the league or the cup. You'll also find political leaders feeling quite happy, as did the pro-consul then, to take advice from those who talk to the spirits, and they'll go and consult with these wicked people who talk and get information from the devil and not from God.

He must have been right sometimes because he had kept his job until now. But it doesn't mean that what is foretold and comes true is therefore of God. The test is when they are confronted with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, the lesson we can learn from this is that even if you are going forward in promoting the gospel or it being promoted in your life, there will come a time, a stage, when you can expect strong resistance from the devil. And you'll find that even if you're so encouraged in a service, so challenged, so touched, that you just say, my life can never be the same. There will be some resistance from the devil somehow to try and confront the power of God in you.

That can be happening right now as you are listening to me. Jesus said in the parable of the sower, that the sower sows a seed and some fall by the wayside, and when the word is sown and they have heard, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts. You know, some people are not toppled by much.

It might just be the whiff of lunch. And that imaginary smell or longing might be real hunger pains, so captures your mind that the seed is gone. Your attention might be drawn away from the word by your problems.

As the word is preached and there's a glimmer of hope for you, suddenly the thought of, oh, it's useless though, I've heard this before, I've tried it, it doesn't work. Ilmus will be there, and he will try and rob you of the word. But now listen to God's reaction as this man tries to turn the proconsul away from the faith as we read in verse 8. We find that though Saul, now called Paul, is diplomatic in some situations, there are other situations, this being one of them, where diplomacy is the last thing you need.

You need to be absolutely uncompromising, you need to be harsh, you need to speak the mind of God exactly as it is into the situation. And he doesn't do it because Paul happens to be a man who gets angry quickly. It's not at all like that.

Notice the words written down for our instruction, verse 9. It says, Saul, who is also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, glared at him. Now he looks angrily with a righteous anger from God. And with one chop at the root of this wicked tree, he chops it down, he says, oh you who are full of deceit and fraud, you are a liar, you son of the devil.

And then he goes on in this verse and the next to speak God's judgment against this resistance. Learn a lesson from this. There are some situations where you need to be perhaps extra wise and very careful and watch and guard your language.

But there are sometimes where your diplomatic efforts and your trying to compromise and make it sound nicer is actually sinful and it's not what the Holy Spirit wants to say. Paul was filled with a sense of anger. He was expressing God's anger against resistance to the gospel of liberation.

Because here was an opportunity for a man to hear the gospel that would cleanse him, that would redeem him, that would set him free. And anyone or anything that resists that opportunity for the gospel to save a man or a woman is dealt with in fierce anger by God. Now maybe you're not called to do that in somebody else's situation, but let's just, to keep it more practical, let's keep this attitude of God for our own lives.

And our opportunity to hear the gospel and to be freed. What enemy is there that rises up to resist that word, that gospel in us? Allow God to speak his mind and his feeling into that situation of yours regarding that thing or that person that is trying to stop God's free flow of the gospel in you. It may seem ironical, but in fact, this statement of anger against the enemy was at the same time a statement of love towards this proconsul who was about to receive the gospel.

And you might find it also true in your life that you will not experience the love of God, the deep love of God that will change you unless you allow God's anger to do his work in your life too. I'm drawing to a close. It's only quarter past twelve in case you've been tempted to look at your watch.

I'll tell it to you. Only quarter past twelve. Just a few more minutes.

Listen carefully, this might be for you. It's a very distracting thing, by the way, for a preacher as he notices people in the audience beginning to shift and accidentally on purpose make the sleeve go down a little bit for the next time when they're going to have a quick look at their wrist. Now, at the very time when you can experience God's greatest kindness and revolutionizing love where you'll be changed forever.

He may speak words of anger, of wrath, of judgment into something in your life. You just need to agree with what God says. Paul simply expressed the mind and feeling of God.

Now, have you been wrestling with something where God has used very strong language already and you've been trying to minimize it? You've been trying to soften the blow and make God's word sound far more human and kind, user friendly. Maybe you know very well that God has said, kick this thing out of your life, foot sack with it. He's used words which the humanists would find rude.

Language that sounds so intolerant, so rough, so aggressive. Agree with God because with that is coming his love that will change your life. Allow God's anger to be directed at the sin in your life and you'll find it will be deflected from you because you can hide yourself in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So put off the waiting, put off the softening of the blow and say it as rudely as God says it regarding this thing that seems to stand up in resistance. The judgment spoken upon Jesus, upon Elemis was instant. There was a mist, at least it wasn't evident to others, but suddenly he was dazed and he couldn't see properly.

Interesting that Paul himself as soul of Tarsus had experienced that mist come upon him as he was resisting the faith. It led him to repentance. With this man, no mist, no blindness would save him it seems, but it became evident to those who were watching this amazing scene that this man who used to give secret insight had lost his sight.

God is able to bring even the one involved in the powers of darkness to himself. There's a wonderful story told by Uncle Kurt Koch in his book Occult ABC. Let me just tell you of an experience he had in Liberia.

He said after I'd spoken to a 70 year old man that's in Liberia, West Africa, who came to see me for counselling, he came to him after the message but the missionary warned him and said be careful this is a much feared sorcerer, he's nicknamed the country devil. He was the president of sorcerers in Liberia. Dr Koch says I felt uncomfortable having a man like that come to me for counselling, but I was in for a surprise.

The sorcerer said forthrightly I want to confess my sins and become a Christian. Then he began to reveal all the sinful things he had done in his life. He had no difficulty in accepting forgiveness and deliverance through faith in Jesus Christ.

He says the missionaries had prepared the ground excellently without their faithful witness of Jesus on the mission field. The sudden conversion of this old sorcerer would not have been possible. In the same way here, there was the victory of light over darkness.

The proconsul when he saw that his seer could not see, he believed. Something far greater, more powerful was evident. The Lord opened his heart and his mind to receive the gospel.

Despite the resistance against the gospel, there was continued victory. Do you feel, child of God, that the powers of darkness are resisting you, that victory seems impossible? Take courage from this. The power of Jesus far exceeds this evil power.

For to him, to the Lord Jesus, all power has been given in heaven and on earth. But allow God to speak, if necessary, words of anger that will separate you from your sin and that would cause you to see the light, not the mist, but see the light and receive the gospel like this proconsul. That is the lesson from Cyprus I wanted to share with you today.

Many different things have been mentioned. Maybe just one thing the Lord has spoken to you about. Act upon that and you will see the difference it will make.

Shall we pray? Lord Jesus, thank you for recording this incident in history and in its place so that we can read about it thousands of years later. Thank you that your same resurrection, power and victory is evident also today. And Lord, you are able to deliver us and turn us from darkness to light.

Lord, wouldn't you speak into our lives your mind regarding things that are resisting you? That by your power it would be dealt the death blow and you would rid us of it and that we would cast it out in agreement with you. We ask you Lord to continue to be with us for the rest of this day, this coming week. We ask you to be with your children who are preaching right now in Europe, in Germany and in England.

Wherever your gospel is being preached throughout the world, even those that we don't know of, Lord let it go forth in the same power that we have read of here in Cyprus. We ask you Lord to continue to be with us for the rest of this day, this coming week.

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