

# To the Uttermost Parts of the Earth

by Mike Attwood

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*This sermon from Acts 13 focuses on the importance of missions and being filled with the Holy Spirit. It highlights the need for prayer, fasting, and yielding to the Spirit's leading in spreading the gospel. The passage also emphasizes the opposition faced in sharing the Word of God and the astonishment at the doctrine of the Lord, urging believers to never lose the wonder of God's grace and plan.*

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## Description

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## Transcript

All right, I'd like you, if you would, to turn in your Bibles to the book of Acts and chapter 13. We're continuing our journey through the Acts of the Apostles, and this is a major milestone chapter that we're going to consider. We're going to read the first 12 verses, Acts 13 verses 1 through 12.

It begins this way, Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers as Barnabas and Simeon, that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Mannion, which had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia, and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews, and they had also John to their minister. And when they had gone through the island of Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-Jesus, which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man who called for Barnabas and Saul and desired to hear the word of God.

But Elemas, the sorcerer, for so is his name by interpretation, withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him and said, O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the will thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness, and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.

Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord. And God indeed will bless that reading of his precious word to us this morning. We've been considering, as we thought about the book of Acts, the key verse being Acts chapter 1 verse 8, where you see the progress that we're going to be looking at today as we've been looking throughout the book of Acts, that is told us in the very outline, verse 8 of chapter 1, but you shall receive power after the Holy Ghost has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, in all Judea, and in Samaria, to the uttermost part of the earth.

And as we've gone through the book, we've traced our way from Jerusalem, that was the first seven chapters, it was all about the gospel in the city of Jerusalem. And then we've gone from Judea into Samaria, that was chapters 8 through 12. Also, while we were in chapters 8 through 12, as well as the gospel going to Judea and Samaria, it was preparing the way for the final thrust, which is to the uttermost parts of the earth.

God had to do certain things to get them ready. One was, he had to convert the apostles to the Gentiles. That happened in Acts chapter 9. That's important, because the final thrust is the uttermost parts of the earth, it's the Gentile world.

We've gone Judea, Samaria, we're going to the uttermost parts. We need the apostles to the Gentiles to get saved, to accomplish that work. And then secondly, we have to get Jews ready to accept Gentile converts.

And so the conversion of Cornelius was part of God's way of showing them, even the dream that Peter had, the next coming down, all the rest of it was all designed to get the Jews to accept, that he was now going to accept Gentiles as equal with Jews in this new entity, the church. And so that was all necessary. So now we're ready for the final thrust, which is to the uttermost parts of the earth.

And that final thrust begins here in chapter 13. I'm going to say something different here in chapter 13, that up to now, it seems that the gospel has spread mainly as a result of persecution. If we look back to chapter 8, for instance, they were all happily in Jerusalem and nobody, I don't think in all honesty, wanted to leave because that's where the apostles were.

And that's where all the memories, that's where the Lord was crucified. There's a lot of sentimental attachment to Jerusalem. Why would we want to leave there? And of course, there's a big church there, 3,000 people saved on one day.

You're like, this is a great place to be. Why do we ever want to leave there? And so the Holy Spirit had to allow something to shake them up. And so we saw in Acts 8, 3 and 4, Saul made havoc at the church, entering into every house, hailing men and women, committed them to prison.

Therefore, they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word. So as a result of persecution, they're scattered like seed from Jerusalem into these other areas and everywhere they go, they preach the word of God. But now in Acts 13, this is a deliberately planned mission of the church.

There's no persecution here. Everything's fine in Antioch. But the Spirit of God is telling them, take this message.

Let's go beyond our borders. Let's break out here. Let's go to the Gentile world.

And so it's a planned overseas mission carried out by representatives of a particular church rather than solitary individuals by persecution. So it's a real radical change. So as we look at this chapter, notice verse 1, it says, now they were in the church that was at Antioch.

Now I want to just stress this idea that missions is from the church. It didn't say from the mission board. We want to be biblical in our thinking.

Now, not that God hasn't used mission boards. I'm not saying that. But ultimately, God's plan is from the church.

And then when they go out from the church, what do they do? Well, what we're going to see as we go through Acts is they went preaching the gospel. And then their converts were gathered together in local churches from the church to establish more churches. What I'm saying is simply this.

God's program in this age is centered on the church. That's what it is. Everything else is a distraction.

It's from the church, it's to establish churches. And we've got to keep reminding ourselves. The Lord says, I will build my, not organizations, I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Christ loved the church and gave himself for her. And it's really all about the church. So here's something Christ loves.

He's committed to build and pioneers are sent out by churches with a view of establishing new churches. And so it's the church is absolutely central to God's program. We've got to keep that clear in our minds.

Very important. And so this local church at Antioch is quite an interesting, what I would say, a model assembly. If you want to know what an assembly is really like biblically, this is a good little snapshot of a scripturally gathered New Testament assembly.

I want you to notice some things about this church. It says they were in the church that was at Antioch, certain prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon, that was called Nigel, Lucius of Cyrene, Mannion, which had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch and Saul. I want you to notice that this church was edified by five gifted men, five prophets and teachers, no one man ministry here.

There's not a pastor at the church at Antioch that does all the teaching. There are five prophets and teachers. Now, again, we do not believe in a one man ministry.

Scripture doesn't teach you one man ministry, neither does it teach in any man ministry. It teaches a plural gifted ministry. Now, let me just say this.

Every believer is a priest. Praise God for that, male and female. Every believer is a priest.

Every believer is gifted by the Holy Spirit. We believe that too. But not every believer is gifted with the ability to edify the church through public ministry.

Not everybody is. And what we've done in assembly history, sadly, is sometimes what we've done is we've rejected one man ministry, and the pendulum sometimes can swing to the other extreme, where it becomes in any man ministry, and if you're a man, you're expected to preach, whether you're gifted or not to preach. You are gifted, but not necessarily to preach, you see.

And this early church, whatever Sunday you went to this assembly, you were guaranteed you'd be edified, because those that ministered were gifted men. You knew you were going to get fed. I mean, there's no question.

When you went to the meeting, you're going to get fed. And so we need to recognize that. We also need to shatter some false ideas.

One of the big, and we've been involved in missions and been to missionary training schools, and they have these ideas, and they sound wonderful until you look at Scripture. And then you realize they're not actually biblical. They may sound good, but they're not actually biblical.

So one of these great ideas is called the indigenous church. And that is that we want churches that have indigenous leadership. And that's what we want.

We've got to have the locals in leadership. Well, the interesting thing is these five gifted men, none of them are from Antioch. Not a one.

It's interesting, isn't it? This model assembly, it's a bunch of foreigners that are doing the preaching. That makes me feel comfortable. So notice Barnabas.

Well, Barnabas is from Cyprus. He's not from Antioch. He's about to go to Cyprus, but he's not from Antioch.

Simeon was called Niger. That means he's a black man, and he's from Africa. So again, he's not from Antioch.

And then Lucius of Cyrene. Again, Cyrene is not in Antioch. And then Mannion, which had been brought up with Herod, the Tetrarch.

That's the guy that had John the Baptist's head lopped off. And isn't it amazing, by the way, how marvelous God's grace is that one of the chief preachers in the church of Antioch grew up with that rascal Herod that chopped off John the Baptist's head. But God reached him even in that place.

Isn't that amazing? That's the grace of God. He's one of the preachers. And then it says, and Saul.

Well, Saul, he's from Tarsus. So not one of these five men are locals. So that shatters the indigenous church myth.

Because in the church, national distinctions mean nothing. There is no Jew or Gentile, slave or free, waxed or unwaxed, or whatever way you want to look at it. There's no distinctions in the church.

We're all one in Christ. All of that's gone. It's the church, which is his body.

And it's from people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. Praise God for that, right? And so no doubt in time, there would be a lot of people from Antioch get saved. And maybe the Holy Spirit would raise up some men from there to have positions of leadership.

Maybe he would. But what we're saying is, this is not how the church does not work according to man's theories and ideas. This is the word of God.

This is what it says. And by the way, it's interesting too. Another thing that you learn a lot about in missiology is this idea of being culturally sensitive.

You've got to kind of take in mind the culture. Again, is that really biblical? I think the word of God is meant to transform culture, not be molded by culture. Well, I'll just give you an example.

Look at Titus, just for a second. I'm just going to sidetrack just for a minute, just to shatter myths. Because I think there's so many myths that are just so unbiblical and yet they're taunted as if like, this is what God says.

But it doesn't say it. It says in verse 12 of chapter one of Titus, one of themselves, even a prophet of their own said, the Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. So the culture of Crete is they're a bunch of liars.

They're evil in their conduct. They're worse than wild animals. Apparently there was no wild animals on the island of Crete, but the local population made up for the lack.

And then it says, slow bellies, lazy glutton, some translations say. So what does Paul do? Well, you've got to be culturally sensitive. He says, this witness is true.

Whoever, one of themselves, the prophet of their own said this, well, he's telling the truth. Wherefore, he says, rebuke them sharply that they may be sound in the faith. In other words, their cultural traits have to be shaped by the word of God, rebuke them.

Isn't that interesting? Don't you just love the word of God? I love the way it just cuts through all the nonsense of the wisdom of this world, even the religious wisdom of this world. So here's these spiritually gifted men. It says in verse two, they're ministering to the Lord and fasting.

And the Holy Ghost said, separately bond with us. Now let me just think a little bit about this word minister to the Lord. It has the idea of ministering, but it has the idea with a worship dimension.

Let me show you how else it's used in the scriptures, the very same Greek word. I don't have to quote it to you, but I'm going to show you where it's actually found. Hebrews 10, 11, it talks about in the Old Testament, it says, and the priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

And so it's that word, the priest daily ministering as they ministered to the Lord, just like the priest would in the sanctuary offering these sacrifices. And so it's got this idea of a worship dimension to it. In Luke's gospel, chapter one, verse 23, you don't have to turn there, but it talks about Zacchaeus, the father of John the Baptist.

And he was on the daily ministrations. In other words, he was doing his daily ministrations. And so the word is, the Greek word is from which we get our English word, liturgy.

You know, the liturgy that people would say, that kind of priestly work is the idea. And so they're praying, but I want to suggest to you, they're praying with an emphasis on worship. There's a worshipping of the Lord going on.

It's linked with fasting. They're also fasting as they're doing it. I want to suggest to you, now, again, I can't be dogmatic about this, but I just wonder if part of what they're worshipping the Lord for is the idea that the gospel has reached them.

That this good news message has come all the way to Antioch. And maybe it is that they're praising God that the gospel reached their shores, their place, that they then begin to think, well, what about, where do we go from here, Lord? What's next in your plan? And they continue to pray and fast, and then it says this, as they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, the Spirit of God speaking. Now, how did he speak? Well, I would suggest probably through one of the prophets.

One of the prophets got up and said, I've got a word for the Lord for this assembly. And that is, we should send Barnabas and Saul out to the work, which God has called them. Now, here's an interesting thing.

I suspect that there were people in that assembly that weren't happy with the Holy Spirit that day. Like, could you imagine if you had Saul of Tarsus in your assembly? Like, this is a gifted man. I mean, he really is.

I mean, you read the book of Romans. I mean, this is a gifted brother. He knows the word.

He's had special revelations from God. You would love it when you went on a Sunday morning and Saul of Tarsus was preaching. I mean, you'd like that better than my cat would any day, right? Saul of Tarsus is preaching this morning.

Praise God for that. You'd be excited. And then Barnabas.

Well, you know what Barnabas is. He's that encouraging brother. It would be like, I don't know who you think is the most encouraging brother in this assembly, but it would be like saying, get rid of him.

Send him away. You say, no, no, we don't want to get rid of him. He's such an encouragement.

The last thing we want is to see him go. And we don't want to see Saul go, but we can think of some people, Lord, that we'd love you to take. I mean, this particular brother, take him.

Oh boy, he's one of those sandpaper saints. He's always rubbing us up the wrong way. Take him, please.

But not Saul, not Barnabas. And the Holy Spirit says, no, actually, I want the best. Give me the best.

Isn't that interesting? For the mission field. To go pioneer in areas where there is no assemblies. Send them.

And so it says, separate me, Barnabas and Saul, to the work whereunto I have called them. Notice it says the work whereunto I have called them. Don't say a geographic location, because they're going to be all over the map.

They're going to be in Cyprus. They're going to be all over the Roman Empire. They're going to be in Philippi.

They're going to be all over the place. God calls men to a work, not a location. It's to a work he calls us.

And so it's a work. And that work will see them all over the empire, the Roman Empire. He calls us to a work.

And so to the work which I have called them. The Spirit of God, as it were, put his finger on these men and said, I want these men to go out. Now I want to just talk a little bit about fasting and praying.

Because it says, when they had fasted and prayed, verse 3, they laid their hands on them and sent them away. They're ministering to the Lord. We said that's praying and fasting.

They're praying and fasting, verse 3. In our churches today, we're good at playing and feasting. They were good at praying and fasting. Their churches were filled with the demonstration of divine power.

Ours are powerless. There comes a time when we've got to stop playing and feasting and start earnestly praying and fasting. If we want to see power return to the church, and if we want to see the gospel go to the ends of the earth.

Because fasting is doing without things that are perfectly legitimate. And doing it just for the sake of doing it is utter nonsense. It usually is connected with burden.

Something that we're burdened about. They're burdened. Maybe you hear about the Great Commission.

And after they identified their men, they're going into enemy territory. We realize these guys, they need prayer and they need earnest prayer that's even got fasting connected with it, because we know where these guys are going. They're going into Satan's territory.

They're going into enemy territory. They need all the help they can get spiritually. And so it says, so they being sent forth by the Holy Ghost.

I want you to notice that. Although the church clearly identifies these men as ones that God has set apart. The one who really sends them is the Holy Spirit.

A man sent by the Spirit of God. The church just really releases them, allows them to go and do the work that the Spirit. And I want you to notice the Spirit's involvement here.

The Spirit of God says send these men. They were sent forth by the Holy Spirit. Acts chapter 20, the Holy Ghost raising up overseers.

Let me tell you the Spirit of God is vitally involved in the life of the local church. And we need to recognize that. He has a will and he makes that will clear.

I want Barnabas and Saul to the work which I have called them. And what is the work that he has called them? Well, it's to go with the gospel to places where they don't know the gospel. That's the message.

I've called them. I'm sending them out. Now, let me just make some points here too, that some people, because it says when they had fasted and prayed, they laid their hands on them.

Sometimes people infer, well, this is, these were ordained men. You see, this laying on of hands is all to do with ordination and they were ordained clergymen, right? Let me just tell you how nonsense that is. First of all, they were already ministers.

Look back at chapter 11, verse 26, where it says, and when he had found him, that's Barnabas had found Saul, he brought him to Antioch and it came to pass that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church and taught much people and the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. And so they'd been ministering for over a year before this laying on of hands ceremony. They're already ministering very effectively in the assembly.

Not only that, Saul of Tarsus was already an apostle. So laying hands on that guy is redundant. God has already laid the nail pierced hands on that guy and said, I want him to be my representative.

And so what does laying on of hands mean? It's always connected with identification. That's what I mean. And so what the church is doing by laying hands on them, there's nothing wrong.

It's a biblical idea is saying we're sending these guys out and we identify with them in the work that God has called them to. And we could put it this way. When, when in the old Testament, the, the sinner laid his hands on the head of the sin offering, what does he do? And he's saying, yeah, I, this is dying in this is my substitute.

And in a certain sense, what the church here is saying, we all recognize we need to go with the gospel, but we're sending these guys out as our substitutes, our representatives, they're going instead of us. And we're, we're supportive of this. We want to identify fully with them in the mission.

We recognize God's leading in all of this, and we send them heartily to do the work. And so it says, they sent them away, or literally, they let them go, they release them because the Holy Spirit is the one who's sending them forth. And so they go down to Seleucia.

Of course, that's a port city. And from there, they take a journey to Cyprus, where the mission, the new mission begins. Now, it's interesting that they go to Cyprus.

Now, we've already identified that that's Barnabas's home area, right? They're going to Barnabas's home patch where he grew up. He's, he's from there, just to prove it to you. And if you were paying attention, when we went through Acts, you'd have remembered this, but it's been a while since we did it, so you might have forgotten.

But Acts 4.36 tells us, and Joseph, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, which is being interpreted the son of consolation or the son of encouragement, a Levite of the country of Cyprus. So he's going to Cyprus, because he's already got connections there. See, part of gospel work is you mine the existing connections.

There's already people, he grew up there. They remember little Barney. Well, he wasn't called, that was Joseph, little Joseph.

But they remember him, right? So there's connections, there's already a web of connections. And he was a Levite. So where did they start? Well, it started in the synagogues.

Why did they start in the synagogues? I thought they were going to go to the Gentiles. Well, and Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles. But he always goes to the Jew first, even though he's the apostle to the Gentiles.

Now, part of the reason is this. He goes to them because God has given him a tremendous burden for his own people. My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved.

And so he can't go to Cyprus and not share the gospel with his kinfolk, his people he loves and he's burdened for. He has to do that. And then secondly, because he recognizes they already have two thirds of the story.

They have all the Old Testament scriptures. They've got a foundation. And all he wants to do is tell them the rest of the story, the important bit, what the climax of the ages is, what it's all leading to.

And so they go to the synagogue and they always start there. And that's what he did. But they don't stop there.

They start there. They go there first. And so it says, when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews.

They also had John to their minister. Now, hold on to that thought. That's the guy called John Mark.

He's going to play an important role in subsequent events in maybe next Sunday. We don't know. We might get there.

We might not. But so keep in mind, John Mark is taken along with them as their minister. And that's going to be significant as we go.

But when they had gone through the aisle on to Paphos. Now, Paphos was the center of the Roman administration on the island. And that's where this guy, Sergius Paulus, who was basically the Roman deputy, the very significant individual, the deputy of the country.

He's there deputizing for Caesar. He's Caesar's representative on the island, you see. So this is the center of Rome.

So now they're more in Gentile territory. And so it says, when they've gone through the aisle to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-Jesus. So they come across this individual.

He's got an interesting name. Bar, it means son of, right? Barnabas, son of encouragement. Bar, son of Jesus, or son of Joshua, Jehovah saves.

But he's anything but like Jesus. In fact, he's more like an antichrist than Christ. We're going to see that as we proceed.

But this man, he's got this name, Bar-Jesus, son of Jesus, or son of Joshua. But he, as well as having this name, he also has something that he's known for. He's a sorcerer.

He's a false prophet. And he's a Jew. How tragic that this man, a Jew, was involved in sorcery or witchcraft.

Because the Jewish law strictly forbade it. Look back with me, please, to Deuteronomy chapter 18. This is the law of God.

And so this man is in dangerous place in that he's defying the very Word of God. Deuteronomy 18 and verse 9, down to verse 14, it says, When thou art come into the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abomination of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer.

For all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord. And because of these abominations, the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee. Thou shalt be perfect with the Lord thy God for these nations which thou shalt possess, hearken them to observers of times, to diviners.

But as for thee, the Lord thy God hath not suffered thee so to do. And so this man is involved in the dark arts, the occult world. He's, we would say he's a wizard, he's a shaman, he's a sorcerer.

That's what he is. And verse 8 tells us that. But Elemas, the sorcerer, so is his name, by interpretation.

And Elemas means shaman or sorcerer. So he's shaman the sorcerer. That's what he's famous for.

And notice this, that in verse 7, we find as well as coming across this fellow called Bar Jesus, and he was the deputy of the country, Sergius, which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man who called for Barnabas and Saul and desired to hear the word of God. So this man, Sergius Paulus, he's a prudent, the idea is wise or intelligent man. That's the idea.

Isn't it wonderful that God says, here's what a wise man is. A wise man is somebody who desires to hear the word of God. And isn't this amazing? See, one of the devil's biggest lies is nobody's interested.

You ever heard that lie? Have you ever believed that lie? It's a lie from the pit of hell. This man clearly is interested. He wants to hear the word of God.

I was telling somebody the other day, it's a wonderful story, but I was with a guy who was 75 years of age, he'd never knocked on a door in his life. And he said to me, he said, Mike, will you take me on the doors with you? I said, brother, I'd love to. So we went the next day.

And we started right next to the chapel. And the first house we knocked on, it was a trailer. And we knocked on this trailer.

And there was a woman's voice inside. And she says, I can't come to the door, but please come in. So we walk in.

There's a lady, she just had knee surgery. Her leg is up on a stool. And she said, that's why I couldn't come to the door.

And so I just said to her, I said, you know, we're from the local assembly here with the local church, we've come out to talk to people about life's most important question, where will you spend eternity? And she looked at me, and she said, when I was a little girl, she said, I accepted Jesus as my Savior. But I've gotten away from the Lord. And I've wandered far away.

And I was just sat here this morning thinking about the story of the hundred sheep, and the one that went astray, and how the Lord Jesus went after that one sheep that went astray. And I was asking the question, who cares about my soul? Who's going to come and be my shepherd who cares for me and you come to

our door? This guy at 75 years of age, suddenly is sold on door to door evangelism. I mean, I didn't have to say anything else.

He was absolutely, what a divine appointment. Here's somebody, she wants to hear. And we found almost every door we went to, we received, we had people actually thanking us profusely and telling us, I've never heard this before.

And so I think it's a complete lie that nobody quite clearly here on their first missionary journey, he is a man. And by the way, he's a high official. He's the very deputy of Caesar on the island, and he wants to hear the Word of God.

Scripture says not many noble, I don't say not any. He is a nobleman that wants to hear the Word of God. Isn't that amazing? And so there's somebody who wants to hear the Word of God.

But then there's this fella, Elymus the sorcerer, who doesn't want him to hear the Word of God. Another important lesson in missions is expect opposition. You're always going to get opposition.

There's always going to be people, as you want to share Christ with others, there'll be those that want to hear it, and there'll be those that don't want people to hear it. And they will adamantly try and stop it. And certainly, that's what's happening here.

He withstood them seeking to turn away, verse eight, the deputy from the faith. He wants to pervert the right ways of the Lord, Paul will say in verse 10, and it's kind of interesting. Remember John the Baptizer? His mission was to make straight the ways of the Lord.

In other words, prepare people to receive Christ. And this guy wants to make crooked, pervert, that's the idea. He wants to pervert the ways so that people can't come to Christ.

He's the very opposite of John the Baptizer. This is what this man is doing. And so we've got a conflict here, a spiritual battle going on.

So notice in the midst of this battle, and we expect that we recognize that there are those people, and part of the reason they don't want people to hear the word of God is that they've got something to lose themselves. This man clearly has a big influence on Sergius Paulus. And he knows that if Sergius Paulus accepts the gospel, he won't listen to no sorcerer anymore, right? So his credibility is on the line here.

And often opposition comes from people who are threatened. Gospel is a threat to their lifestyle, a threat to their views, and all the rest of it. So we need to expect opposition.

But notice verse 9, it says, then Saul, who was also called Paul. This is the first time we hear about Saul being called Paul. Now why here? Because Saul is a very Jewish name, isn't it? One of the first king, right? The first king of Israel was Saul.

And Paul is now beginning his work in reaching out to the Gentile world. So he's got a different name now. He's Paul.

But the other thing is that Saul, it meant the one desired. I mean, all eyes were set on Saul. He was one desired.

And now Saul is following one who's rejected, not desired. And the name Paul means little. And we've said it before, we say it again, God only uses little men.

What I mean by that is I'm not saying if you're six foot six, God can't use you. I'm not saying that at all. But you must always be small in your own eyes, if God would ever use you.

Because if you're too big for your own boots, God can't use you. God resists the proud, but he gives grace to the humble. And Saul had been humbled.

Oh, had he been humbled. He bit the dust on the road to Damascus. He was brought very, very low, wasn't he? Chewing dirt.

And now God says, okay, you're just where I want you. I can use you now. And he's Paul.

So name is changed. Notice it says, Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him. Luke constantly refers to the idea of the filling of the Spirit.

And what he's telling us in an unmistakable term is this, that you cannot do the work of God in your own strength. You must be filled with the Spirit of God. You must allow the Spirit of God to be the one that works through your life.

If you're doing it your own strength, you're not going to succeed against people who are involved in witchcraft, and demonism, and all these things. You don't have a hope. Forget it.

You better be filled with the Holy Spirit. Because greater is he that's in you than he that's in the world. But you need to yield yourself fully to he that's in you.

You need to be filled with the Spirit. And so here he is, he's filled with the Spirit. We're commanded, by the way, in Ephesians 5.18, to be continually filled with the Spirit.

And so this Spirit-filled man sets his eyes on Elimas, and he said, full of all subtlety. Does that remind you of anything? Remember the Garden of Eden? Remember the serpent was more subtle than any other creature. Crafty, you know, sneaky, crafty, full of all subtlety, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? Isn't it an amazing thing that filled with the Spirit, Paul is very blunt and direct with this man.

Sometimes you have this idea that being filled with the Spirit is, you've got to be, you know, meek and mild and, you know, kind of wouldn't say boo to a goose, you know, that kind of thing. That's an English thing. You obviously didn't get it.

But, you know, this concept of being Spirit-filled, yeah, we should have the fruit of the Holy Spirit, but the Lord Jesus, nobody was more filled with the Spirit than him. But when he spoke to the Pharisees, he called them vipers. He said some very strong, why? Because they were trying to keep the common people from coming to him.

And that's exactly what this man is doing. Now the tragedy is today, in the name of the church, there are people entering into dialogue with shamans. Isn't that amazing? I mean, the Pope of Rome, I've got pictures of him with Indian medicine man shamans all on the same platform, all seeking to bring about a one-world religion, and it's so utterly foreign to the New Testament.

Paul is saying, you're an enemy of all righteousness. Anybody who's involved in the occult world is an enemy of all righteousness. They're not somebody to sit down and have an ecumenical council with.

They're somebody to confront and denounce. You see, all this sounds rather harsh in our politically correct environment. Remember what we said about culture? We're not to accommodate to culture, we're to confront culture.

And so what does he do? He says, now behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness, and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. Does that remind you of anybody? Anybody else that was blinded and needed somebody to lead him by the hand? Oh, it was the guy that's just done this, right? Wasn't it Saul? Now, why does he do it to this guy? Well, because in Saul's case, blinding him was the best thing that ever happened to him, wasn't it? It was part of the process of humbling him so that he would accept.

Maybe he's thinking the same thing of Telemus. Maybe what happened with me might happen with him. But also, it's a picture of something else, because in a sense, it's a tragic picture.

Remember, this guy's a Jew. What did God do with the Jews who persistently tried to stop people coming to Christ? What does the Bible say? Blindness, in part, has happened to Israel, right? It's judicial blinding. That's exactly it.

Let's just look again at the Scriptures. Just see Acts 28, when we get to Rome, kind of our final destination. And again, he meets with the Jews, and they're hostile.

They reject what he has to say in verse 26 and 28. It says, saying, Go to this people and say, Hearing you shall hear and shall not understand. Seeing you shall see and not perceive.

For the heart of this people is waxed rose. Their ears are dull of hearing. Their eyes have they closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and should be converted.

And I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you that the salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles, that they will hear it. And then Romans 11, verse 25, I've already quoted it.

And it says, For I would not, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own conceits, that blindness, in part, is happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles be coming. You see, it's one thing to reject the gospel in yourself. That's a very serious thing for you personally.

That determines your eternal destiny. But it's a much more serious thing when you try to stop others from coming to Christ. And God brings this judicial blindness on this person because of his seeking to do this.

But there's a good ending in this way. Verse 12, it says, Then the deputy, this is our friend Sergius Paulus, when he saw what was done, believed, notice, he saw what was done and believed, but what really astonished him? It says, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord. Yeah, I mean, he's certainly impressed by what he's just seen.

I mean, he just witnessed this powerful individual being blinded, and it left an indelible impression on his mind. But what really astonished him, and what should astonish us more than anything else, is the doctrine of the Lord. Just as we thought this morning, it should forever astonish us that the eternal Son of God should come to this earth and take on flesh, that he might go to a cruel cross and die there for our sins, bearing them in his own body on the tree, so that we might have a relationship with God.

That should astonish us. In fact, we should be eternally staggered at the amazing gospel of the grace of God. He was astonished.

At the doctrine of the Lord. So what practical lessons can we learn? We might ask, are we concerned about the Great Commission? Are we in the right spiritual condition to receive direction from the Holy Spirit? Are we ministering to the Lord and fasting? Is that even in our thinking? Seeking God's face? Lord, how do we reach our generation? How do we reach the lost in our neighborhood, really praying earnestly about this? So the Lord sends us out. This chapter tells us two things.

We'll find people who want to hear the Word of God. No question about it. We'll find people who want to hear the Word of God.

But we'll also receive opposition. It's a given. It goes with a tip.

Those two things go together. And then finally, are we astonished at the doctrine of the Lord? Or have we lost the wonder, the absolute amazing wonder of it all? Why Paul, I believe, was so effective as a servant of God is that he never ever got over it. He loved me and gave himself for me.

Forever, he was just astonished. Astonished at the doctrine of the Lord. God used him greatly because he never lost the wonder.

Beloved, let's not lose the wonder of it all. It is amazing. And so many of the best hymns are ones that are filled with wonder.

Amazing love, how can it be that thou, my God, shouldst die for me? Amazing grace, how sweet the sound! But save a wretch like me, I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see. And all these great hymns all have one common thread. Astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.

God help us to never lose the wonder of his great plan. Let's pray. Father, we're so grateful for the Word of God because it cuts through so much false ideas, false thinking amongst saints, amongst ourselves, Lord.

We've often believed Satan's lies that no one's interested. We've often been fooled by these things. We've often been taken up with man's clever schemes and ideas.

And yet so often your Word just shows the folly of it all. Help us, Lord, to be a people of the Book who just humbly bow to the Scriptures. Get our convictions, get our ideas, not from men's philosophies and men's wisdom, but from the simple Word of God, who will give thee the glory.

In the name of the Lord Jesus, we pray. Amen.

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