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Acts 13:4-12

Christ is Your Faith

So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. ⁵ When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them. ⁶ 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. ⁷ He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. ⁸ But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. ⁹ But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him ¹⁰ 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? ¹¹ 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. ¹² Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

(Pastor Prays)

Even from the earliest of days, the kingdom of darkness has been eager to influence those who rule, those who are close to power, whether it's politics or the pulpit, and the story here is no different.

I'd like to start from the end and work backward. In the text before us, Paul and Barnabas are on the initial mission trip to Cyprus. In v. 5, they preach in a place called Salamis. In v. 6, they run into trouble, a guy names Bar-Jesus (which means "Son of Salvation"). He's a fast-talking turncoat Jew. He is a self-styled false prophet. V. 7 tells us he has attached himself to the proconsul – a ruler in the region. This ruler, named Sergius Paulus, wants to hear the Gospel, but v. 8 tells us Elymas (the man also called Bar-Jesus) tried to stop it. In v. 11, God strikes the false prophet temporarily blind. Paul and Barnabas preach and God miraculously saves the politician.

Leading someone to Christ is all-out war against the forces of evil. And if you live as a Christian, whether you are a teenager who's being bullied or a teacher being intimidated or a business person being overlooked for advancement, you glorify God when you suffer, because you are a Christian.

But how do we manage it? How did Paul and Barnabas get up every day knowing what was waiting on them? It's the same way you are going to get up and face what you've got to face tomorrow morning. Make Christ your life.

When Christ is Your Life, Life is Good...No Matter What

What are some of the adjustments? I'd like to give you a couple.

Learn To Live As a Missionary

Learn to see your life as belonging to the Lord and your set of circumstances as your mission field.

So much of our contentment comes from how we view ourselves and who we feel like we belong to.

Let's get a feel for the story. Start back up in v. 2 and read through v. 4. *While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."*³ *Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.*⁴ *So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.*

You see that Paul and Barnabas are sent. See the language. V. 4 says they are sent out by the Holy Spirit. They are "living sent."

How do you live as a missionary? 1. You have a divine commission, a mandate from the Lord. And if you have a divine commission, it changes what you consider a victory and how you measure success. Your job becomes your mission field and enemies become who you pray for and seek to reach. When you live as someone "sent," you don't get sidelined or snagged by things that just don't matter. The church has been given the divine commission to make disciples, to verbally tell the story of redemption. You are to position yourself and live your life and manage your family and choose your words to help people see that Jesus Christ is Lord.

It's what Paul said in Colossians 3:23 *Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.*

You see this divine mission God has given you has a clear message. Notice what Luke tells us in v. 5. *When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them.* That's Luke's way of saying they shared the Gospel and told people that there is *one* God and there is *one* mediator between God and men – the man Christ Jesus. And repeating the story of Christ is our

life's work, a work that transcends all other distractions and hobbies and busywork life sends our way. It will mean that Christ is your life, and when Christ is your life, life is good, no matter what.

Learn to live your life as a missionary. But also,

Expect Opposition

In fact, let me say it little stronger: Expect people to hate you and to make fun of what you believe.

Paul and Barnabas hit some fairly stiff opposition in the text. Hell is always opposed to God's good plan and especially to the Gospel. Notice the opposition. It starts in v. 6 but you have to read all the way through to v. 10 to get the full description. *6 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. 7 He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. 8 But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. 9 But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him 10 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?"*

Here is a universal truth illustrated in dramatic fashion. Let me pick out a couple of things to help you spot the opposition.

V. 6 tells us there is a false prophet who's named himself Bar-Jesus – son of salvation. v. 10 – Paul calls him the "son of the devil." Any means of getting close to God without going to the cross is a false gospel that bubbles up from Hell itself. "For the Lord of the cross is folly to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God."

In v. 8 you see that this prophet is working against the proconsul coming to Christ. You will be opposed at school, at work, and in your neighborhood. Let people find out you are a believer and watch them stand back like it is contagious. In v. 9, Luke tells us Saul drops his Jewish name for the Roman name, Paul (Paulus), probably for contextualization of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Paul points out some other ways he was opposed. Notice what Paul says about this false prophet in v. 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? Full of all deceit. The word "deceit" comes from the Greek word for "snare" or "trap," the kind of trap used by hunters to trick an animal, or a mouse trap with a piece of cheese or peanut butter.*

He was not what he appeared to be – which is so often the case about the seduction of sin. It promises something it cannot deliver, like cheese or peanut butter on a set trap. Sin promises satisfaction and fulfilment when, in fact, all it delivers is brokenness and death. It's deceit. Pornography is deceit. The American dream is deceit. Big debt for decaying goods is deceit. It's why we anchor our hopes in Christ.

Let me pause here and speak to some of you who might be flirting with a myriad deceits in the world. Proverbs 7 has one of the most explicit descriptions of temptation and it is there as a warning for us:

*My son, keep my words
and treasure up my commandments with you;
2 keep my commandments and live;
keep my teaching as the apple of your eye;
3 bind them on your fingers;
write them on the tablet of your heart.
4 Say to wisdom, “You are my sister,”
and call insight your intimate friend,
5 to keep you from the forbidden^[a] woman,
from the adulteress^[b] with her smooth words.
6 For at the window of my house
I have looked out through my lattice,
7 and I have seen among the simple,
I have perceived among the youths,
a young man lacking sense,
8 passing along the street near her corner,
taking the road to her house
9 in the twilight, in the evening,
at the time of night and darkness.*

¹⁰ And behold, the woman meets him,
dressed as a prostitute, wily of heart.^[c]

¹¹ She is loud and wayward;
her feet do not stay at home;

¹² now in the street, now in the market,
and at every corner she lies in wait.

¹³ She seizes him and kisses him,
and with bold face she says to him,

¹⁴ "I had to offer sacrifices,^[d]
and today I have paid my vows;

¹⁵ so now I have come out to meet you,
to seek you eagerly, and I have found you.

¹⁶ I have spread my couch with coverings,
colored linens from Egyptian linen;

¹⁷ I have perfumed my bed with myrrh,
aloes, and cinnamon.

¹⁸ Come, let us take our fill of love till morning;
let us delight ourselves with love.

¹⁹ For my husband is not at home;
he has gone on a long journey;

²⁰ he took a bag of money with him;
at full moon he will come home."

²¹ With much seductive speech she persuades him;
with her smooth talk she compels him.

²² All at once he follows her,
as an ox goes to the slaughter,
or as a stag is caught fast^[e]

²³ till an arrow pierces its liver;
as a bird rushes into a snare;
he does not know that it will cost him his life.

²⁴ And now, O sons, listen to me,
and be attentive to the words of my mouth.

²⁵ Let not your heart turn aside to her ways;
do not stray into her paths,

²⁶ for many a victim has she laid low,

*and all her slain are a mighty throng.
27 Her house is the way to Sheol,
going down to the chambers of death.*

Now if you step into the trap of sin and are caught, that doesn't have to be the end. Remember, we deal in hope here.

If you will turn from it, forsake it, come to the cross where that sin is paid for through the cross of Christ, God forgives and restores.

It's a trap. There is another accusation in v. 10. Let's read it. *"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?"*

Isn't that what Satan does? He makes the straight paths of the Lord crooked. We see that all around us with gender confusion and the normalization of what the Bible clearly calls a sin. So if you believe that God created humans and made males and females with distinct roles in life and marriage, then you probably think the earth is flat and rode to church this morning on an ox cart.

There's such pressure to take the straight and clear teaching of the Lord and bend it to the "new normal" when we are called to do just the opposite. We come with our crooked lives and are shown our crookedness when we read God's law. And in reading His law, it puts us in despair because we can't live up to it.

Adrian Rogers used to say, "I wouldn't trust my best 15 minutes in life to get me into Heaven" because without Christ, we are sinners who sin and need a Savior.

Now I'm going to talk to those of you here who are not believers, because in the story, the government official became a Christian in v. 12 and I'm praying you will as well.

There are many things opposing you coming to Christ. Maybe a lifestyle you will have to give up or an addiction you will need to drop. Maybe you will be ridiculed by friends or even ostracized by family. But if you don't turn from sin and turn to Christ, something far worse awaits you. There's just a glimpse of it in the story: judgment.

God will punish your sin – either on your stand-in substitute Jesus, where He took the punishment for sinners on the cross – or you stand alone in your sin before a holy and righteous judge.

Today I am asking you to drop all the distractions and hang-ups and excuses and come to Christ. He will cleanse you, forgive you and protect you.

Come believe and be saved because, when Christ is your life, life is good...no matter what.

(Pastor prays)