

Text: Acts 13.1-12
St Stephen's

December 16th, 2007
Sun AM

Freed From the Devil's Power

Remember what happened in Chapter 12?

We **started out the chapter** and things looked bad.

- Herod was on a rampage. James had been murdered! Peter had been arrested. The next day he was due to be executed. The believers in Jerusalem were huddled together behind locked doors and praying. Not with a lot of confidence.

By the time **the chapter ends**, we have been reminded that

- Peter is free. The church is astounded! Herod has met his fate. Everywhere Jesus' is being talked about.

The story picks up in Ch 13, and as it does, **leadership moves** from Peter to Paul, the **mission moves** from Jerusalem to the Gentile world.

When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.

In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul.

Acts 12:25-13:1 (NIV)

Antioch was the third largest city of the Roman empire. About 500,000 people lived there at this time, people from all over the Roman Empire. It was a multi-racial, cosmopolitan city. The church in this city became the **springboard** for the early mission of the church

Let's take a look at what happens...

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." ...

Acts 13:2-4 (NIV)

Look at the phrase, "*While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting...*" This is not a picture of a normal worship service on Sunday. I think it is

a picture of **a season** of prayer and worship and fasting. **They are focused on the Lord. They are seeking his face. His hand has been upon them. So...** they have cleared the deck so they can see him better, hear him better. No food. No distractions. No diversions.

The Holy Spirit speaks... We aren't told how. I presume it was by **prophecy**, but whether it was in inner, unspoken leading or a verbal out-loud prophecy, it was clear... *"Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul..."*

And **they do**. They fast and pray for some more days, and they lay hands on them, and commit them to this work, and send them out.

Take a Note: Accomplishing God's mission means giving your best...

That is worth noting in this season when we are thinking about our year end giving and our support for next year's work here. The church at Antioch sent out Barnabas and Paul. That was 40% of their leadership team and these two – I have no doubts about it – were the **leaders** of that team. **They sent out their best.** That is what it takes. It was a **risky strategy** for a young church. Giving is always risky. But that is what God had asked of them. Give me your best! Not your leftovers, but your best. Not your afterthoughts, but your best.

They were pleased to do it. Why? **Because God had given them his best.** And they knew it. The gospel is about how God holds nothing back from us. His very best he gave – and gives. So they were glad to give their best. The **result**, by the way, was the **mission flourished.** And the **church flourished.** That's the way it works with God. **He gives. We give back. And it all flourishes.** So, "they sent them off."

Did you notice that **they didn't get a job description?** (our search process has a long job description...)

"Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Acts 13:2

Just, *"the work to which I have called them..."* We find out what that work is as we read through the rest of the Book of Acts. It is **the mission to the gentiles**. This is a big moment. It is about AD 46, by the way. Some 16 years after the resurrection of Jesus. 'The work...' turns out to be three mission journeys, and maybe a fourth, to the ends of the known world. But they aren't told that. Not here, not yet. God unfolds it, page by page, week by week, over the next 20 or so years.

Take a Note: Accomplishing God's Mission Means Following the Holy Spirit...

The #1 qualification for this mission team was **to be ready to listen to Jesus and trust him and follow him**.

Sometimes God calls you to do something and he doesn't give you the details. He just wants you to trust him and step out, and **he will unfold it to you along the way**. Isn't that the way it goes in marriage, in raising kids, in ministry, in life? You have to start by faith. You have to listen along the way. You have to follow where he leads. **You have to trust him** to figure it all out. Do you think you can trust him to figure it all out?

Paul and Barnabas did. So they headed south some 15 miles to the port of Selucia and sailed some 100 miles to the island of Cyprus. They preached from the east end of the island to the west end – which was also about 100 miles, focusing on the Jewish people in the synagogues.

There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus...

Acts 13:6-8 (NIV)

They came to the capital city of **Paphos** and met this character named '**Bar-Jesus**' or **Elymas**, who was a Jewish sorcerer. Just stop on that idea for a moment. **Those two words don't go together**. Jews hated sorcery. It was absolutely **forbidden** in scripture, because it would open the door to demons. But this is not Israel, it is Roman Cyprus. And Roman religion and culture was **shot through with demonic presence** and influence. This was just the first of many such moments.

This guy Elymas worked for the **Roman governor** of the island, Sergius Paulus. And the governor wants to hear what Paul and Barnabas have to say. He's probably heard something of their message. Were told he is a bright guy. He is interested. He is spiritually hungry. And he sends for Paul and Barnabas. He wants to hear more. And were told that Elymas *opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith.*

Take A Note: Evil Spiritual Forces Will Contend For Every Life.

The procounsel wanted to hear the gospel, but the gospel was **blocked** by this Jewish sorcerer. That is **what evil spirits will do**. They will **block, distract, confuse**. They will **keep you away** from believers, away from the gospel, away from a good church, away from the Bible, away from faith in Jesus. They have a personal stake in keeping people away from conversion. They are capable of **using all kinds of people and strategies**. It maybe someone like Elymas who probably has become possessed with demonic powers. They may **use a relationship or a weakness or a lifestyle**.

There are **evil spiritual forces that will contend** for every life. Often, **their power must be broken before people can be freed to respond** to Christ. So Paul goes right at Elymas...

Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun."

Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand.

Acts 13:9-11 (NIV)

This kind of incident happens again and again in Acts. It is a **power encounter** between two Kingdoms, the Kingdom of Jesus and the Kingdom of Satan. It is a **showdown** between the Holy Spirit and an evil spirit. This kind of stuff happens all the time, because **Satan is**

real. I want you to think about this as we go through Acts...

I remember **when I had demonic attacks.** I had spent years in drug use and wild living, and I now found that though I was now a spiritual seeker, faith was slow. My first years in 'spirituality' were in Hinduism and meditation and finally a in cult where I was doing these things and also starting to read the bible, but the cult was channeling spirits. Edgar Cayce. Maybe you have heard of him. By this time I had friends who were also sharing Christ with me. I wanted to know more about Jesus, but my doubts were large. Change was slow.

I was having **troubling dreams** about spirits and spiritual forces. I remember one moment (late at night half asleep...) when I was sure **Satan was in the room** with me. I was afraid to open my eyes in my bedroom and look through my dark bedroom door...

I kept repeating all night, *"He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world..."* (1 John 4.4) I was terrified.

A year later it all came to a head... when a friend asked me if I had ever been **involved in drugs or occult...** She then asked me if I knew anything in the **bible** that taught against what Cayce taught... Well, Cayce taught **reincarnation**, and by that time I had run into Heb 9.27 ("It is appointed for man to die one, and after that comes judgment") She asked me on the basis of that verse if I would **renounce** all my involvement with drugs and Cayce and ask Jesus to cleanse me of any evil spirits. I said I would. Right there – we were in my car – **we prayed.** I had no overwhelming experience. But I've never had a dream like that since then. And the doors of faith and forgiveness opened wide from that time on. When I shared this with Bishop Stanway once, he looked at me and said, **"That was deliverance"**. I have no doubt.

Take a Note: Jesus is Greater Than Satan.

When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

Acts 13:12 (NIV)

You and I live in a culture that is at the same time skeptical about demons and fascinated with them. I think the more skeptical we get, the more materialist we get, the more it creates room for a resurgence of demonic forces. We are seeing such a resurgence. You can't miss the **footsteps of Satan** as you look across our culture today...

Sometimes Satan must be removed, before faith can come.

Demons are real and must be dealt with. That is what happened here.

To remove Satan, **two great weapons** are given us. **Renunciation** of his influence and the power of **prayer** in Jesus' name.

It is not a matter of getting the words right – it is just simple **renunciation** – shut every door, walk away from any relationship, reject his presence and influence..

and straightforward **prayer**, "Lord Jesus, if there are demonic forces here, take them away. Cast them out. By the power of your cross, by the power of your victory over all evil forces, cast them out – deliver us from evil".

Satan is real, but Jesus is greater than Satan.

Jesus brings freedom from the Devil's power.