

1/14/24 - Acts 13:1-12 - "The Work of God & Fire Alarm Systems"

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[0 : 00] Our scripture today is from the book of Acts in the New Testament, chapter 13. We'll be reading the first 12 verses.

Acts, chapter 13. Hear the word of God.

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers. Barnabas, Simeon, who was called Niger.

Lucius of Cyrene. Menaean, a lifelong friend of Herod the Tetrarch. And Saul. 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.

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.

[1 : 16] And from there they sailed to Cyprus. And when they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them.

And 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. 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.

[2 : 40] Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord. This is the word of God.

Amen. Amen. Now, not many of you may be aware, but in my previous life, before God called me in this place, in this season, full time, I worked in the fire alarm industry, and now primarily designing.

I wouldn't touch any fire alarm systems. I didn't trust myself. But I'm primarily designing them and laying those systems out for installation.

So, a lot of office work. And that's ironic, being that in 2014, we suffered from our house burning down. And now here I am in the fire alarm system.

So, it's just like insult to injury, it seems. But I don't know if I should laugh or cry at that. I just, it's kind of like an odd little tension there. But the Lord is sovereign over His plans for us.

- [3 : 57] But going back to the fire alarm stuff, there's one expensive system out there that everyone cringes at when you're in this industry. It's called a voice fire alarm system. These systems don't just make a lot of noise and beeping and alarms. These systems give you the problem of what's going on. And they also tell you where to go and what to do. And this stands in complete contrast of just those regular pesky alarms that make the loud, flashing, buzzing noise that everyone in our homes, we just silence because it's annoying. These systems don't just make a lot of noise. These voice systems give you the problem and give you instructions. Now, surveying the history and even the current climate of the church, there appears to be a similarity between those alarm systems and the church.
- [5 : 03] There's a lot of churches grabbing attention, making a lot of noise, but giving little guidance. Giving little instruction of any problems going on. And in our text here, as we look upon Cyprus, we follow along with Barnabas and Saul as they run into that very problem in Cyprus. What we'll be seeing in this passage today is that it's going to ask us a question in our lives. Whether you're a believer or a non-believer, it will ask you a question. This question is, will not just our eyes be open, but will our hearts also be moved? And the sections that we break the text down today will provide the essentials of how the Lord does that through the power of the Holy Spirit and His hand upon us.
- [6 : 12] We're back in the series of Acts today. We've been out of the series since 2022. We took a pause before the spread of Paul's, well, Saul's missionary journey. And so I'm excited to step back into this series with you today. And the first part of this section, we're going to be titling, The Work of God and Fire Alarm Systems. Okay. I'm glad you found that humorous. I'm all about memory retention. I'll make any sermon title so that you remember. Okay? The Work of God and Fire Alarm Systems. Please join me in prayer as we turn to His Word. Blessed Lord, you have caused all holy scriptures to be written for our learning. Grant us that we may in such a way hear them, read them, to mark them, to learn them, and inwardly digest them.
- [7 : 23] That by patience and comforts of your holy word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Get those coughs out, everyone. Let's look at a couple points here. We've got three points. The first point is that God works through praying and fasting. We see that here in verse 1 all the way to verse 3. Here we receive in verse 1, fascinating insights into the powerful working of God within the midst of worshiping believers. The Holy Spirit spoke, and guess what? The church responded. We literally just look into, just in these few verses, we enter into a church service. Holy Spirit spoke, the church responded. Just as we desire every time that we come into this gathering and open the word of God, we plead with Him to speak to us.

[8 : 45] And so too, the Holy Spirit speaks even today. Now, coincidentally, that's a tongue twister, during a time, this happened during a time when the church was praying and they were fasting.

You get that? But God spoke through the Holy Spirit at church, and the church simply responded.

Doesn't that seem so simple? Right? Now, how much of it is correlated to the prayers and the fasting? We simply do not know.

But what we do know is this. God desired to work, and the church desired for God to work.

There was a desire of God, and there was a desire of the church to enter into that work. It's a corporate gathering, a corporate life of the church.

[9 : 49] God has been on the move since the Holy Spirit fell in Jerusalem. We see that all the way back to a promise in Acts 1, verse 8.

And it unfolded in Jerusalem. That sent shockwaves throughout the region, through Judea and Samaria.

Sent more shockwaves even after that fell to the ends of the earth. Isn't that interesting? All correlating to the promise of Acts 1, verse 8, where Jesus says to His disciples before His ascension, But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

And so this is unfolding. Even now, we see from Acts 2, the fall of Jerusalem, which led to a summary statement, leading to temple Jews, and the Word of God increased and multiplied.

All the way to the next shockwave of the Holy Spirit falling in Acts 8, in Judea and Samaria. And we see that summary statement right before it reaches the borders.

[11 : 14] The Word of God increased and multiplied. And then all the way to the end of the earth, in Acts 10, where we see in Cornelius' house, the Holy Spirit falling.

And that summary statement, also, regarding those non-temp, or the Gentiles, in that time.

This has been the regions, the summary of the work of God. God is on the move. And the movement of that spread has not ended either.

This is still continuing, even in our text today. And it's even continuing in our day today, just as we pray for churches all around us.

In fact, the variable factor of God's continued pursuit of the lost church rests in our willingness to devote ourselves to that movement.

[12 : 16] that's where it gets challenging. It's easier said than done. We look at the church service here in verse 1 through 3, and we say, wow, the Holy Spirit spoke, and the church responded.

It is certainly easier said than done. But what we certainly know, we don't understand it all, but God does do that work and responds to the prayers and the fasting of His people.

We don't understand it all, but we know in His sovereignty and His divine decree, He is guiding history, and He allows the prayers and fasting of His people to be a factor within that spread and movement.

In other words, a church that fails to pray has already failed the mission. A church that isn't fasting, is failing that mission.

At least our participation in that mission, we know God's mission will never fail. Amen? We are the ones who often fail that mission.

[13 : 32] Though maybe the best reminder that we receive in such a short passage between verse 1 and 3 is that regardless of how we might feel, God is not done yet.

When you turn on the news and as tragic as things may seem overseas, just across the pond as our UK friends say, God is still not done with that.

God's pursuit of the lost is unrelenting. But do we hear His voice? Or do we respond?

Do we just hear His voice similar to a fire alarm system and we just say, Amen, going home and continuing the way that we've always done things?

Or do you hear His voice? Does He have your attention? And do you respond similar to that of a fire alarm voice system? Well, for Barnabas and Saul and that church, as far as they're concerned, they respond.

[14 : 43] They send these two men out and they're on the move. They seem to always be on the move. Which leads us to the second point of the passage is that God works in the face of opposition.

We're going to see this from verse 4 to 5. The apostles make their way and I find it interesting.

We always hear about sometimes pastors being called to suffer for the Lord in Hawaii. Not too bad, right? Suffer for the Lord down there.

Against those crazy spiders that they have that are like this big. These two apostles make their way to none other than Cyprus. It's an island.

They're island boys. Right? Maybe you're not a Gen Z or millennial. You don't get that. It's okay. But it's not too bad. Right? Things seem like everything's going alright.

[15 : 51] And maybe that's no wonder that Luke in his writing here mentions that John is assisting them. I would. I'd say. I'm coming with you guys.

Cyprus sounds pretty good. Let's go suffer for the Lord there. But something important we have to see. As we see them go to this Mediterranean island, the activity of this mission trip was not a vacation at all.

There was work to be done. What kind of work? Word work. work. God's work. God's work. Which all centered around the word work.

Just as it has since the spread in Jerusalem. And the word of God increased and multiplied. That word work is continuing here in Cyprus in this mission trip.

And I think some of our missionaries around the world today could benefit of understanding that mission trips are not vacations. Look at this work in verse 6.

[17 : 07] When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bargesus.

He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. a man of intelligence who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.

Can you see the scenario playing out here? Tension is rising. There's a song about that. Tension is rising.

Things are getting a little bit tense. This false prophet, you imagine him being pushed to the side. The guy who was with the proconsul, just the governor, with this guy in power and authority, pushed to the side in order to hear the true prophets.

To hear them and what they need to teach. It's as tense as former President Trump pushing aside Paula White to call John MacArthur to the Oval Office.

[18 : 20] Okay? This is tense. This is a tense time. No more lies. I want to hear what they have to say.

And verse 8, Elamus, the magician, for that is the meaning of his name, opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.

You see, false teachers are more dangerous than you realize, than we can ever realize. We often just undermine the effect in our day of how much influence and how toxic false teachers are.

Church, false teachers in your neighborhood, within churches, within your neighborhood, are far more dangerous to a murderer living next door to you. They distort the truth.

They take massive people away from the faith, away from the Word, and in so doing, leading massive amount of people away from God.

[19 : 35] You think that sometimes false teachers care about you, or prophets may have cared about you. they don't give a rip about you. They only care about themselves.

And we see that here. This magician opposes them. This is my job. How dare you come in here? I got this proconsul under my control.

How dare you? But the good news is we get a reminder here because the church is called to confront, to mark, and avoid. Did you hear that first one, though?

Confront and mark and avoid? Not only the books that we see on the bookshelf, but also the bands that we see on Spotify. Mark and avoid.

This is a confrontation that stems all throughout Scripture. similar to Peter's confrontation of Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8, which even goes back even further.

[20 : 45] We want to go back to Exodus. Moses' confrontation with all Pharaoh's sorcerers in Exodus 7 and 8, and even a little bit further to Elijah's confrontation with the priests of Baal in 1 Kings 18.

The church responds to false teachers and false prophets, whatever you want to say, whatever you want to call them, we respond in not today Satan.

That is the call of the church. We see Saul here, he speaks, 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, fool of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?

Lord, there is something important to remember in that confrontation is that Saul was not full of his own anger, he was full of the Holy Spirit.

It was the Holy Spirit that was truly confronting this false teacher. Not your opinions, it's the Holy Spirit.

[22 : 24] Indeed, Luke makes it clear in this text that the irony regarding this magician's name, his name is Bargesus, which means son of Jesus, isn't that usually what false teachers in our day to day kind of mask themselves?

Oh, I'm the son of Jesus. Look how wonderful my life is. And I mentioned Jesus how many times? Don't forget the 10% of lies that I perverted in that, but Jesus, right?

It's like a Trojan horse of toxicity. False teachers are not the son of Jesus, they are the son of Satan. They're the son of Satan.

And more than that, they're enemies of all righteousness, full of deceit and villainy. They're malicious as they distort the truth of God. And look what happens, and now in verse 11, he says, 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 hand.

[23 : 42] Church, this is serious business. This is serious business. We can't undermine the effect of what it means for people to draw people away from the faith, even if they mention Jesus a couple times.

I mean, we've often heard sayings and phrases that kind of minimize that reality of that serious business, like a broken clock is what? It's right twice a day, right?

But the church must reject everything that then comes out of their mouth because this is serious business. In other words, there is not a single thing a false teacher can say that is worth hearing than their repentance to God, even if they are wrapped in the package of Bar Jesus, the Son of Jesus.

Saul was in similar shoes as this opponent of God. They were both struck with blindness as a sign of judgment for their rebellion against God.

Just as Saul was in rebellion and persecuting the church, so too this magician is being judged for his rebellion against God.

[25 : 04] And we see something important there that there is no distinction. You can be religious as Saul was and quote the verses, do the things, do the song and dance of the church.

But if you are in rebellion of God, there is nothing that you can do to make that right except repent. And the same goes for blatant lies like a false teacher. We don't know how the story ended for Eliamas, but we certainly know how it ended for Saul.

the cure for his rebellion was repentance and faith in Christ. That is the cure for rebellion.

Often I wonder what keeps unbelievers in unbelief. I think about that often. I think about the hope that we have in Jesus Christ, and who would ever want to reject that hope and say that it's not good enough for them.

We know that unbelief is rebellion against God. We often ask ourselves why. Well, John 3.19 says that unbelievers love the darkness, not the light.

[26 : 27] They love something greater than God. It's called idolatry. And sometimes I ask this question of what will it take to wake an unbeliever up?

Does anybody else have a family member that just is an unbeliever that doesn't believe in Jesus? No matter what you say to them, no matter how persuasive you could be with your words, it's just you can't get through to them.

It often leaves me wondering, what will it take to wake them up? Well, for Elimas, he was shaken like our response to a fire alarm system.

You realize that something's wrong. But for Saul and both of them, they realize that they need something to be saved from.

We don't know how it ends up for Elimas, but we definitely know how it ended for Saul. They realize their need for rebellion.

[27 : 39] They don't just see the alarms going off. And friends, today, if God is warning you and woken you today to realization that you're not doing as good as you thought you might be doing, of living life how you think that you ought to live it, well, the love of God is seen today for you through the love that you see and apprehend from His words.

This ought to not only wake you up, but you should hear a voice, a voice guiding you as we see in the third point.

God works through the word of God. In verse 12, you see that the story changed for this proconsul.

In verse 12, then the proconsul believed when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

Like a voice fire alarm system, not only was the governor alerted and believed that something significant was occurring, it took him blindness to realize that.

[28 : 50] and the man who led many astray, this proconsul astray, into their own darkness, he's led in darkness, being led by other people to think about it.

There's something significant here. I don't want you to miss this. He was astonished, not at the miracle, not at anything that had been done, he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

God uses the vessel of His Word to bring about salvation. It not only alerts you to a problem, it gives you the solution and the guidance of what to do, all through the Word of God.

Now, miracles may occur in life at times, they may. And rather than being attention-getters, what humanity does is do what we do best. We raise them up and we look at them as we elevate the wrong things and in so doing we devalue the important things.

We lift up the miracle and lower the message. And in fact, God even woke me up through a miraculous intervention. But it was just that.

[30 : 18] it was grabbing my attention to change that there was a problem similar to that of a fire alarm system. And it is only through the abiding Word that convicts and transforms.

Or as I've heard it said, miracles can grab attention but only preaching brings conviction. Now, considering that even the greatest miracle of all, Jesus' death and resurrection from the dead, some people would still not believe, even people who saw Him.

So we can't say that seeing is believing. There's nothing that you can do that can help equip you to believe. You could touch His scars and still not believe.

But it is instead the power of God, working within all of our hearts, that truly brings belief into our lives, responding to the power of the Holy Spirit working through His Word.

It's important to realize that the hand of God was both upon this magician and the governor. One brought judgment, the hand of judgment, the other was the hand of salvation.

[31 : 37] Truly, God's Word is a two-edged sword, is it not? God asks you, what hand is upon you today? Both hands have the power to humble us, to guide us, and to show that He is God and we are not.

What hand is upon you today? Judgment or salvation? Hear His voice today and respond to Him in faith.

Does God have your attention this morning? If so, what is He calling you to do? How will you respond?

How will you follow? Well, for some of us, today is a painful realization that you have been living a lie, defining your own truth, piecing, maybe just morphing all these different pieces of religious thought and customs and sort of making your own metamorphosis of religion and doctrine, choosing the good, discarding the bad, treating religion like a bag of Chex mix.

Well, this road has a terrible air. It's the epitome of rebellion. And the Word of God calls you to repent of that.

[33 : 11] The Word of God does. God has come to us to make straight the path of salvation. He's the way, the truth, the life.

No one comes to the Father except through Him. Romans 10 9 says, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame. Maybe to you, compared to your little metamorphosis of religion, maybe that seems too narrow for you.

It just doesn't make sense. Well, you have a choice here. You can ponder that question based on your intellect, or you can simply have faith in the way, in the truth, in the life, and come to the Father through Jesus Christ on account of your faith.

But still for others, might we not lose sight of the hand of God at work on account of our hands that are performing the work?

[34 : 23] Maybe I need to repeat that. Might we not lose sight of the hand of God at work on account of our hands that are performing that work?

Don't miss the hand of God that is guiding Barnabas and Saul. Don't miss the hand of God that is guiding this confrontation of what is false.

Don't miss the hand of God that is also bringing about salvation. From verse 1 to verse 12, I want you to see the hand of God at work and guiding.

So this brings us to a humble challenge today. Like we said at the beginning, will not just our eyes be open, but will our hearts also be moved?

Regardless of where God calls, regardless of what confrontation is brought along your way, or regardless of how unfathomable the mission may seem, will not just our eyes be open, but will our hearts also be moved?

[35 : 47] That question is posed rhetorically today to ponder in your hearts to God. Let's pray.