

The Rest of the Story

Studies in the Book of Acts

***“We will move the world not by criticism of it, nor conformity to it –
but by combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God”***

Vance Havner

Text

Acts 13:4-12

Topic

Paul must square-off against Elymas the sorcerer who is trying to keep proconsul Sergius Paulus from getting saved

Title

Sorcerer Smackdown

Acts 13:4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

Acts 13:5 And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as *their* assistant.

Acts 13:6 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,

Acts 13:7 who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.

Acts 13:8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.

Acts 13:9 Then Saul, who also *is called* Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him

Acts 13:10 and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, *you* son of the devil, *you* enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?"

Acts 13:11 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.

Acts 13:12 Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

Introduction

Sooner or later you will be sought out by someone who is looking for answers. They've heard you talk about Jesus or seen the difference your relationship with Him makes in your daily living.

You're excited! You begin to share the grace of God with them. Then things get quirky. Someone's at the door; the phone keeps ringing; someone else interjects themselves into your conversation and gets it off track.

Or maybe a sorcerer shows up to withstand your witness! That's what happened to Paul and Barnabas. Sergius Paulus had called for them to come and share with him about the Lord. Elymas **withstood** them. The sorcerer found he was no match for the Spirit-filled man.

Whether it's a cell phone or a sorcerer the interruptions are no match for you when you are filled with the Spirit. I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You Need Not Be Intimidated When Your Witness Is Withstood, and #2 You Need To Be Empowered When Your Witness Is Withstood.

#1 You Need Not Be Intimidated When Your Witness is Withstood (v4-8)

Barnabas and Saul, who is the apostle Paul, were sent out by the Holy Spirit to talk about Jesus. *So are you and I.* They were sent to the island of Cyprus. We are sent to work or school. Wherever we find ourselves is where we've been sent to be witnesses. Let's see what we can learn from Barnabas and Paul that can help us to be witnesses.

Acts 13:4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

Acts 13:5 And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as *their* assistant.

We're not sure why the Holy Spirit sent them to Cyprus. We do know it was Baranabas' home. It serves as a reminder to not forget our

witness at home. Ministering to others can be a lot more exciting than living-out the Christian life day-by-day at home. But if Jesus makes no difference in my home life, then what do I really have to share with others?

The strategy Barnabas and Paul employed was to go to the Jewish **synagogues**. Visitors would be invited to read from the Scriptures and comment. I'm sure Barnabas and Paul would pick texts that spoke about Jesus to use as a springboard.

Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The gospel does not change. But we can and should adapt our delivery of the message to our audience. We should make every effort to know something about them and then meet them where they are at.

John, also called Mark or John-Mark, was tagging along with cousin Barnabas and Paul serving as their assistant. What a great opportunity he had – to be interning with the apostle Paul. We'll see that he was not quite up for the task, however, and will leave the team to return home.

Assistant's are great unless you have to assist them! If you are in the place of an assistant, do it so that the person or person's you are assisting have no worries about your area of ministry.

Acts 13:6 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,

Luke (the author of Acts) overlooked months of ministry to focus our attention on this one episode. Let's look at how he described this man:

1. He was a **sorcerer**. The word is *magi*. It described the wise men of that era who mixed science with the occult. They were both astrologers and astronomers; they were both alchemists and chemists.
2. He was a **false prophet**. This tells us he claimed authority from God he had not received.

3. He was a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus. All of that should be taken together. Bar-Jesus means *son of Jesus*. He was claiming to be a true follower of the Jewish Messiah.
4. Finally, in verse eight, you learn he was called Elymas. It is roughly the Arabic equivalent of magi. It's sort of like having a title after your name, like Master of Divinity or Doctor of Theology. It tells us he thought himself superior on account of his education.

All these have their modern counterparts. For example: If a sorcerer is someone who mixes the occult or pseudo-science with Scripture, then we've lots of candidates. Psychology is a philosophy of man that masquerades as science. For decades men have added it to God's Word. The mixture is deadly to the soul.

Acts 13:7 [Elymas] was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.

For you history buffs: The Roman provinces were of two types. One type required troops to enforce Roman law and was administrated by the Emperor. The other type of province enjoyed Roman rule and did not require troops. It was ruled by the Roman Senate through a **proconsul**.

Sergius Paulus was **intelligent**. It means he liked to reason things out and put things together. It tells us why he had Elymas around. He was hungry for spiritual truth. When he heard about the ministry of Barnabas and Saul he sought them out to hear what they had to say.

People are hungry for spiritual things. There are people all around us who will sooner or later seek to hear the Word of God through us. When they do, the interruptions will come fast and furious.

Acts 13:8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.

Elymas had a lot in his arsenal to withstand the truth. He knew and acknowledged the Word of God but polluted it with the religions and philosophies of man; he spoke as though he had authority; he seemed connected to the Word of God, being himself a Jew; and he had impressive worldly titles next to his name.

Sounds like an evolutionist... or a psychologist... or a liberal theologian. It sounds like people who borrow the arguments of these supposedly learned men in order to withstand the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The opposition may come from a third person or it may come from the very person seeking to hear the Word of God. As you share they remember things others have told them – arguments against the Gospel.

There is a vast arsenal marshaled against you and your witness. It's easy to become intimidated. ***Don't become intimidated!*** You don't need to know everything in order to refute those who stand in the way of a person's salvation. You only need to know the Savior.

You need not be intimidated because you can be empowered.

#2 You Need To Be Empowered When Your Witness Is Withstood (v9-12)

The confrontation between Elymas and Paul was dramatic. It was extreme. But it is not unlike the confrontations you might have when you share the faith. You, too, face the sorcerer's, the false prophets, the phoney followers, and those who claim superior intellect. How can you hope to prevail? After all, you're not an apostle.

Paul was not described as 'the apostle Paul' using his apostolic authority. He was described as **filled with the Holy Spirit**. *So can you be filled!*

Acts 13:9 Then Saul, who also *is called* Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him

Saul was his Hebrew name; **Paul** was his Roman name. We'll talk about being his being **filled with the Holy Spirit** in a moment.

Acts 13:10 and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, *you* son of the devil, *you* enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?"

Should we ever address a person this way? If we are led by the Spirit to do so. When a soul or souls are at stake we must be as bold as the situation requires. We don't know exactly how Elymas withstood Paul and Barnabas. It may be that his opposition was so fierce that this level of response was necessary.

Elymas was **full of deceit and fraud**. So are all who try to mix the impure religions and philosophies of man with the pure Word of God.

He was **son of the devil**. It doesn't mean he was possessed or a satanist. It means he was unsaved, lost in trespasses and sins. He remained a man with only a natural birth needing to be born again.

He was **enemy of all righteousness... perverting the straight ways of the Lord**. Righteousness, or getting right with God, could not be achieved in any of the ways Elymas thought or taught. It must be received as a gift by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. His teachings would keep people on the broad path that leads to destruction and thus keep them off the Lord's straight path.

Really Paul was speaking the truth in love. It wasn't just Sergius Paulus' soul that was at stake. **God was reaching out to Elymas**. This seems to be indicated in verse eleven.

Acts 13:11 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.

It was only **for a time**. That tells us the blindness was not a *punishment* but had a *purpose*. Two things suggest themselves:

1. The physical blindness of Elymas could represent to him his spiritual blindness. He thought he was leading others in the truth but was being shown that he was the one who needed leading.
2. Second, this has to remind us of another person who was struck with temporary blindness for a time. Paul had been struck blind on the road to Damascus when he was saved. Elymas could emerge a saved man!

God is not willing any should perish but that all would come to repentance. While Paul's words initially seem harsh they were the right words, spoken in the necessary tone, to bring the best result.

We don't know what happened to Elymas after his blindness ended... But we do know that Sergius Paulus was saved.

Acts 13:12 Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

He **saw what had been done**; but what **astonished** him was the **teaching of the Lord**. It might mean that he understood what had been done was **for him** – so that he might **believe** the Gospel and be saved.

We have kept in reserve the thing that made all this possible. Paul was **filled with the Holy Spirit**. In previous studies we've discussed the various relationships a believer has or can have with God the Holy Spirit. We've talked about the Holy Spirit being **with** you before you believe; about Him coming **in** you when you believe; and about Him coming **upon** you simultaneously or subsequently to you believing in order to empower your witness of Jesus. And we've mentioned the command to go on being filled with the Spirit.

I want to suggest a simple way of understanding **being filled**. I think it can be understood using three words:

1. The first word is *person*. The Holy Spirit is a person. He is the third person of the Trinity. He is God and has all the wonderful attributes of God.
2. The next word is *presence*. This wonderful Person, God the Holy Spirit, is always present. He is present with the sinner, seeking to draw him or her to Jesus. If you are a believer He is present in you. Jesus further said He would be the Comforter sent to come alongside you.
3. The third word is *power*. It is the result of understanding that the Person we're talking about is present with you always in every situation. Because God is personally present, you can always count on power that is sufficient for your witness.

God the Holy Spirit is right there with you to empower your witness.
Whatever or whoever the opposition - you are more than a match for
it.

