

## “The Gospel Cannot Be Stopped”—Acts 13:4-12

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*[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions, please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, [www.welovethegospel.com](http://www.welovethegospel.com)]*

Take a Bible and meet me in Acts 13...

Every single day, we find ourselves caught in an unseen, cosmic tug-of-war. We wake up, head to our workplaces, sit down in our classrooms, and interact with our neighbors, completely oblivious to the spiritual tectonic plates shifting right beneath our feet. It is dangerously easy to think that the difficulties we face—the moral compromise in our corporate culture, the skepticism of our friends, the relational friction in our families, or even the persistent doubts in our own minds—are just natural, human problems. But the Bible pulls back the curtain of history to show us a much bigger reality: we are the church militant, stationed on a literal spiritual battlefield. The moment the Gospel of Jesus Christ begins to advance into new territory, the kingdom of darkness stands up to oppose it. Whenever God builds a straight path of truth to a human heart, the enemy works tirelessly to make it crooked.

This morning, as we step into Acts 13 again, we are witnessing a massive pivot in the history of the world. Up until this point, the book of Acts has primarily concentrated on the church in Jerusalem and Judea. But here, “the horizontal advent” of God’s mission explodes outward across the Mediterranean.<sup>1</sup> The Holy Spirit has called, set apart, and launch the very first intentional missionary team: Barnabas, Saul, and their young assistant John Mark. They are traveling straight into pagan territory to announce the radical good news that humanity’s revolt against a holy Creator has been answered not with a mission of destruction, but with a mission of rescue. They are declaring that Jesus Christ bore the wrath of God on a Roman cross so that hopeless sinners could find eternal restoration and new life.

But as we will see in our text today, this advance immediately provokes a ferocious clash of spiritual powers. Luke, the author of Acts, takes us to the island of Cyprus, where the Gospel encounters both a hungry political ruler and a deceptive sorcerer trying to choke out the light of the Word. The question this text forces us to answer is this: When the forces of deception, darkness, and worldly opposition array themselves against the message of Christ, what gives us the confidence to keep speaking?

The truth we will discover is that the Gospel cannot be stopped. No heart is too hardened, no dark power is too entrenched, and no intellectual is too sophisticated for the piercing authority of God’s truth. Let’s look together at how this dramatic spiritual breakthrough unfolds, by looking at the text. Let me invite you to stand to your feet in recognition of the authority of God’s Word. Follow along as I read beginning where we left off last week, in verse 4...

*“So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. <sup>5</sup> When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. <sup>8</sup> But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. <sup>9</sup> But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him <sup>10</sup> 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? <sup>11</sup> 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.'* (Acts 13:4-12)

This is God's Word. You may be seated...

We'll consider these verses in three sections today, beginning with...

### **The Mission Dispatched: The Divine Deployment (4-5)**

Turning our attention directly to the text of Acts 13:4-5, we find ourselves at a monumental threshold in human history. The previous verse tells us that the leaders of the church at Antioch fasted, prayed, laid hands on Barnabas and Saul, and sent them off. Yet look again how Luke opens verse 4: "*So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and there they sailed to Cyprus.*" As I mentioned last week, there's a beautiful and intentional dual agency at play here that we cannot afford to miss. The congregation at Antioch identifies, affirms, and practically releases these men, but the true authority, the ultimate engine, and the active command belong entirely to the third person of the Trinity. The church commissions, but only the Holy Spirit possesses the power to truly anoint and effectively deploy servants for sacred tasks. The horizontal sending agency of the local church does not cancel out or conflict with the vertical sovereign action of God; rather, the church serves as the visible instrument through which the invisible Spirit performs His divine will.<sup>2</sup> For us to have a truly biblical picture of missions though, we have to recognize that God is the primary actor.<sup>3</sup>

To understand this divine deployment, however, we need to also understand something of the geography that Luke carefully details in these verses. Barnabas, Saul, and their young assistant John Mark walk approximately sixteen miles downstream along the Orontes River from the cosmopolitan center of Antioch to its bustling harbor city, Seleucia Pieria, which served as a critical naval base for the Roman imperial fleet. Standing on the limestone docks of Seleucia, breathing in the salt air of the Mediterranean, they look westward. If it were an exceptionally clear day, looking across the vast expanse of the sea, they may have faintly discerned the distant, mountainous silhouette of the island of Cyprus rising out of the water a hundred miles away.

But here's a question we could ask: Why did they choose Cyprus as their very first destination? The Scriptures don't record a dramatic audible voice from heaven prescribing that exact route. It's possible, I suppose. But we must also recognize that the Spirit of God normally interacts with human reason. Scholars widely agree that the choice of Cyprus represents a perfect harmony between supernatural guidance and practical common sense, demonstrating that the Holy Spirit does not routinely contradict logical human strategy. Cyprus was the native homeland of Barnabas. He knew the culture, he spoke the dialect, and he likely had familial connections throughout the districts. Furthermore, earlier believers fleeing the initial waves of persecution in Jerusalem had already traveled to Cyprus to scatter the first seeds of the Gospel. They were not acting as reckless freelancers making up a ministry on a whim. No, they were being faithful to their corporate mandate, in step with both strategic wisdom and the Spirit.<sup>4</sup>

When their ship finally grinds into the harbor of Salamis, the prominent eastern port of the island, verse 5 notes that they immediately "*proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews.*" Here Luke introduces a theological and historical blueprint that will characterize Paul's entire missionary career: entering a new city and going "to the Jew first."<sup>5</sup>

The choice of the synagogue was brilliant and deliberate. The synagogues provided a naturally receptive, highly concentrated audience of individuals who already possessed a deep familiarity with Old Testament monotheism, corporate worship, and ethical standards. Saul and Barnabas did not have to spend weeks establishing common ground or explaining who Abraham, David, and Isaiah were. The foundation was already laid. They could step

right into the center of the room and boldly announce that the ancient promises of Israel had finally found their yes and amen in Jesus Christ.

And what exactly was “*the word of God*” that they proclaimed so unceasingly? Let’s start with what it wasn’t. They were not preaching a generic message of self-betterment, civil morality, or vague spirituality. They were preaching instead the message of the cross and the empty tomb. They were announcing the global solution to the ultimate human crisis. The very reason a missionary journey was necessary is because humanity exists in a state of active, catastrophic revolt against a holy Creator. Because of our collective rebellion, we just stand exposed to God’s holy and righteous wrath. Yet, out of an incomprehensible, pursuing love, God sent His own Son, Jesus Christ, into our broken world to live the perfect life we failed to live, and suffer as a substitutionary sacrifice upon the cross, absorbing the full weight of the judgment we deserved. The proclamation in the synagogues of Salamis was a clarion call to radical repentance and saving faith—an invitation to step out of the darkness of human rebellion and into the light of Christ’s restoration, looking forward to the day when He will renew the entire creation.

Luke also includes a brief, easily overlooked detail at the end of verse 5: “*And they had John to assist them.*” The term used to describe John, who was Barnabas’ cousin (Col 4:10), is translated as “assistant,” and it’s one that is used in ancient papyri for trusted helpers who handled things like the transport of vital documents and texts.<sup>6</sup> It may be that John Mark was there to help carry the scrolls, manage the rigorous logistics of travel, and perhaps even assist in the foundational catechism and teaching of new converts.<sup>7</sup> He wasn’t vacationing on the island. He was working. We might think of him as an apprentice or an intern. And he reminds us of the crucial reality that every single detail of Gospel advancement matters—from the upfront, bold public proclamation of the preacher to the behind-the-scenes, heavy-lifting administrative support of the assistant.

This is what their deployment looked like. But what I want you to recognize is that the Holy Spirit has never gone out of the deployment business. Let’s bring this closer to home. The very same Spirit who pushed Saul, Barnabas, and John Mark off the docks of Seleucia is the Spirit who has placed you exactly where you are. Think about what that means for your daily life. If you are a student sitting in a university lecture hall, surrounded by secular philosophies and deep moral confusion, you are not there by accident. You have not merely enrolled in a curriculum; you have been divinely employed by the Holy Spirit to be a faithful, clear beacon of Gospel truth to a generation searching for identity. If you’re a young professional navigating the complex, often cutthroat, ethics of the modern workplace, you are not just earning a salary or climbing a corporate ladder. You are an ambassador sent out in a contested territory of wealth and power to demonstrate the supreme worth of King Jesus through absolute integrity and sacrificial love.

If you are a blue-collar worker clocking into a noisy job site, or a medical professional walking the exhausting hallways of a hospital, or a widow quietly enduring the agonizing ache of a lonely home—here this truth: your life is not drifting without purpose. You have been sent. God is a pursuing, searching, and actively saving God who uses ordinary people, practical wisdom, and everyday avenues to push His unstoppable light into the darkest corners of human rebellion. Knowing this, my prayer is that we, like the early church, remain utterly alert to what the Holy Spirit is doing, submissively keeping in step with His active deployment, pursuing the fame of the name of Jesus.

Yet, as the missionaries in this text discover, divine deployment always invites demonic defiance. As they reached the provincial capital of Paphos, their faithful Gospel advance ran headfirst into a dark roadblock, which brings us to our next movement...

### **The Magician Dismantled: The Clash of Powers (6-11)**

As we move from the eastern shores of Cyprus into the interior of our passage, Luke shifts our gaze from a routine, peaceful deployment into a high-stakes spiritual confrontation. Look at verse 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.” To truly feel the weight of this moment, we have to look closely at the geography.<sup>8</sup>



The text tells us that they traversed the entire length of the island—roughly a hundred miles of rugged terrain. They walked from Salamis in the east all the way to New Paphos in the west, preaching the Gospel as they went in every village along the way. New Paphos wasn’t just another beach town. It was the seat of the Roman provincial government, a wealthy hub known for its magnificent temples, its deep-seated immorality, and its worship of Aphrodite.

It is here, in the very headquarters of Roman political power, that the missionaries collide head-on with a man who embodies the folly of spiritual corruption. Luke describes him as a “*magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus*” (13:6), who also went by the Greek name “*Elymas*,” which means “*magician*” or “*sorcerer*” (13:8). Think about the tragic irony of this man’s identity. His name, “*Bar-Jesus*,” literally translates to “son of Joshua/Jesus” or “son of salvation.” By heritage, he was a son of Israel, a man who should have been guarding the sacred oracles of God, waiting expectantly for the true Messiah, the true Jesus, and guiding others toward the truth. Yet, by practice, he had utterly abandoned his calling to peddle demonic deception, astrology, and occult practices. He had taken a name that promised light and used it to cloak a ministry of absolute darkness.

The text tells us that this “*false prophet*” had successfully embedded himself in the highest level of pagan society. According to verse 7, “*He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence*”. Now, a “*proconsul*” was the highest-ranking Roman official on a senatorial province like Cyprus—effectively the governor. He possessed immense political authority, commanded military forces, and answered directly to the Roman Senate. Luke explicitly points out that Sergius Paulus was “*a man of intelligence*”—an astute, discerning, and educated Roman patrician.

This historical detail raises a glaring question that modern readers often stumble over: How could a highly intelligent, sophisticated Roman governor be taken in by a back-alley sorcerer like Elymas? To answer this, we have to look at the cultural mindset of the first-century Greco-Roman world. History tells us that it was standard practice for Roman magistrates and elites to keep private astrologers, diviners, and religious advisors on their

personal payroll. These politicians didn't make major decisions, launch military campaigns, or sign treaties without first consulting the stars, examining animal entrails, or seeking supernatural omens.

Furthermore, Jewish men who dabbled in the supernatural were highly sought after because pagan elites viewed Judaism as an ancient, mysterious religion that held unique power over the spiritual realm. Elymas wasn't seen as a parlor-trick magician; he was a highly influential political operative, a religious gatekeeper who manipulated supernatural forces to solidify his standing at court. He enjoyed wealth, status, and unchecked influence over the ruler of the island. He reminds me of Grima Wormtongue, from *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, who whispered poison into the ear of King Theoden of Rohan on behalf of the evil Saruman.<sup>9</sup> If you know, you know.

But everything changes in verse 7. When Sergius Paulus hears that two traveling teachers have arrived in Paphos, his intellectual curiosity is piqued. The text says he “*summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.*” This is an incredibly significant shift. The most powerful man on the island actively commands a private audience to hear the Gospel.

And this immediate summons instantly triggers panic in the heart of Elymas. Verse 8 exposes his motive: “*But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.*” Do you see what is happening beneath the surface here? This is not a friendly academic debate or a professional disagreement. This is a desperate, frantic power struggle. Elymas recognizes that if the governor embraces the true word of God, his own spiritual deception will be exposed, his supernatural authority will be shattered, and his lucrative political influence will vanish in an instant. He's threatened.

He stands up in the proconsul's court to actively interrupt, mock, and distort the message of the cross. He uses every ounce of his rhetorical and spiritual influence to build a wall of resistance between a searching soul and the saving truth of Jesus Christ. And this still happens today. Indeed, this resistance reminds us of a critical theological reality that many modern Christians prefer to ignore: wherever the Gospel is clearly proclaimed, demonic opposition will often manifest. Satan does not gently concede his territory. He will use every available instrument—intellectual pride, cultural intimidation, or spiritual confusion—to try to prevent an individual from coming to saving faith.

It is exactly at this point of intense spiritual friction that we witness a stunning transformation in Saul's leadership. Look carefully at verse 9: “*But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him...*” This is the famous pivot point in the book of Acts where Luke permanently switches the Apostle's name from his Hebrew name, Saul, to his Roman name, Paul.<sup>10</sup> Some older commentators used to teach that his name change was a direct result of his conversion on the Damascus Road, but the text shows that he had been called Saul long after that event. The scholarly consensus today is that Paul, as a Roman citizen born in Tarsus, had possessed both names since infancy, using his Hebrew name within Jewish circles and his Roman name in the wider empire. Luke strategically highlights his Roman name right here because Paul is stepping into a purely Roman arena, confronting a Roman governor, and officially launching his global mission to the Gentile world.

Notice also that Paul is described as being “*filled with the Holy Spirit*” (13:9). This isn't referring to his initial conversion or the permanent indwelling of the Spirit. Rather, the Greek syntax points to a sudden and powerful equipping by the Holy Spirit for an immediate, critical task. Armed with this supernatural authority, Paul does not mince words, he does not compromise, and he does not offer a polite, tolerant dialogue. He turns his gaze directly upon the sorcerer, locking eyes with him in an intense standoff, and delivers a devastating prophetic indictment in verse 10.

Listen to Paul's scathing words: “*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?*” (13:10). Every single phrase is a deliberate, surgical dismantling of the magician's entire identity. Elymas called himself “*Bar-Jesus*,” the son of

salvation. Paul looks him in the eye and strips away the mask: “You are not a son of salvation; you are a son of the devil! You do not reflect the character of the God of Abraham; you mirror the deceptive nature of the ancient serpent!” Bar-Jesus has been exposed as a Bar-devil.

Where Elymas claimed to possess secret, celestial wisdom, Paul exposes it as raw deceit, fraud, and villainy. He accuses him of actively “*making crooked the straight paths of the Lord*” (13:10). This imagery draws heavily from the Old Testament prophets, specifically Isaiah, who spoke of preparing a smooth, level highway for the arrival of the Lord.<sup>11</sup> God had laid out a clear, straight road of truth leading directly to salvation in Christ, but Elymas was intentionally throwing up roadblocks, digging deep trenches, and twisting the map to lead seeking souls into eternal destruction.

Then comes the immediate, terrifying sentence of divine judgment in verse 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.*” This is a moment of dramatic irony. Elymas claimed to have special spiritual sight, no doubt, boasting that he could see into the future and interpret the hidden spiritual realm for the governor. Because of his pride, God strikes his physical eyes to match his spiritual reality. He who claimed to guide others into the light is instantly plunged into total, helpless darkness. Look at how Luke describes the immediate fallout at the end of verse 11: “*Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand.*” The proud, influential counselor is reduced to a staggering, fumbling beggar, desperately seeking bystanders to guide his footsteps.

Perhaps we should pause here and ask a significant theological question: What is the true nature of this blinding miracle? Is it vindictive, permanent destruction of a human being, or is there a hidden thread of divine mercy running through this curse? There’s some beautiful discussion in the literature about the significance of the phrase “*for a time*” in Paul’s words. Many have highlighted, like John Calvin and R. C. Sproul, that this judgment was purposefully temporary, which stands in sharp contrast to the permanent destruction we often see in human vengeance. God did not strike Elymas permanently dead. He bound his sight *for a season*. Why? Think about who is delivering this sentence. This is Paul!

Recall that, years earlier, Paul himself was a furious, self-righteous religious zealot, charging down the road to Damascus, breathing threats and slaughter against the church of God. He thought he possessed flawless spiritual sight, but Christ struck him down with a blinding light, plunging him into three days of physical darkness so that he would finally recognize his own internal spiritual blindness. Paul’s physical blindness was the dark womb out of which his saving faith was born. Therefore, when Paul, filled with the Spirit, pronounces this exact same judgment upon Elymas, it seems to me, it is not an act of personal malice. It is a severe, disciplinary mercy. There is a glimmer of hope.<sup>12</sup> God completely neutralizes the sorcerer’s ability to harm others, while simultaneously giving him a desperate, dark grace period to experience his brokenness, repent of his fraud, and cry out to the true Son of Salvation for sight.

Take a step back and feel the direct application of this insight in our lives. This passage stands as an enduring, unmistakable picture of the total supremacy of King Jesus over every competing power structure in our world. We live in a culture that is absolutely saturated with modern versions of Elymas. Our world is filled with smooth-talking influencers, secular philosophies, and spiritual shortcuts that promise meaning, status, and enlightenment while actively twisting the straight paths of the Lord.

You see it in the pervasive “prosperity gospels” that treat God as a cosmic vending machine to be manipulated for material wealth. You see it in secular ideologies that scream that you can define your own truth, create your own identity, and master your own destiny. You see it in the subtle, everyday temptations to trust in your career, your financial investments, or your political affiliations to provide the security and peace that only Jesus Christ can guarantee. These avenues promise sight, but they leave you fumbling in the dark.

But look at the ultimate comfort of this text: when the true Gospel comes into contact with human deception, the powers of darkness are utterly dismantled. They cannot stand against the raw authority of the Holy Spirit. If

you are sitting here today feeling overwhelmed by the brokenness of the world, or terrified by the cultural hostility facing the church, or wrestling with an addictive sin pattern that feels completely unbreakable, look at the fumbling sorcerer of Paphos. The enemy you face is a defeated foe. The deceptive systems of this world are on a short leash, bounded by the sovereign hand of God “*for a time.*”

Our calling is not to cower in fear, to compromise the truth for cultural acceptance, or to fight the world’s battles using the world’s weapons. Our calling is to stand firm, filled with the Holy Spirit, and to boldly declare the unvarnished Word of God. We can move forward with absolute confidence, knowing that the very same Christ who opened the eyes of Saul and bound the eyes of Elymas is actively advancing His kingdom today, exposing human fraud, breaking spiritual chains, and proving Himself to be the supreme, uncontested Lord of all.

In verse 12 we see the final outcome of this confrontation...

### **The Magistrate Delighted: The Triumph of Truth (12)**

When the dust settles on this intense spiritual battlefield, and the echoes of Paul’s holy indignation fade, our eyes are drawn away from the blind sorcerer to the man sitting on the governor’s seat. Luke records the stunning climax of the encounter in verse 12: “*Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.*”

Notice the incredible and ironic reversal that has just taken place here in Paphos. As one sixteenth-century commentator observed, “The magician becomes blind; the proconsul becomes able to see. Unbelief makes the magician blind. Belief makes the proconsul able to see.”<sup>13</sup> The very man who claimed to possess spiritual sight is left groping in the physical darkness, while the worldly ruler who was trapped in spiritual darkness is suddenly filled with the brilliant light of eternal life. The spell of deception has been entirely shattered, and the truth of God has triumphed over the occult.

But I want you to look closely at what ultimately captured the heart of this prominent Roman official. The text does not say he believed simply because he was a stunned eyewitness to a miraculous act of judgment. Miracles can certainly arrest our attention, but signs alone do not bring saving faith or biblical conviction. Rather, Luke tells us that Sergius Paulus was “*astonished at the teaching of the Lord.*” The miracle was merely the divine trigger that tore down his intellectual prejudices. It was the proclamation of the Word of God that actually overwhelmed his soul and transformed his heart. He looked at the shattered power of magic, he heard the glorious message of the cross, and he was absolutely shaken to the core by the sheer authority and beauty of divine truth.

What was “*the teaching of the Lord*” that left this sophisticated, highly educated Roman ruler utterly astonished? It was the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Think about how radical this message must have sounded to a man immersed in Roman paganism and political power. Paul and Barnabas didn’t come to him offering a checklist of moral self-improvement or a syncretistic philosophy he could just incorporate into his worldview to make his life a little better. They came announcing the Gospel, the same Gospel they had been announcing across the island. They told him of his sin. They warned of divine wrath. They explained why Jesus came and what He accomplished by His death on the cross. They announced His resurrection. They invited this Roman leader to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior. They shared the good news that Jesus offers full reconciliation with God and new creation to anyone who repents and believes. To a magistrate accustomed to demanding the submission of others, he was suddenly confronted by a King who submitted Himself to death to save His enemies. That is a message that astounds the mind and breaks the heart. And so, we read, “*the proconsul believed*”.

What is more, this dramatic triumph of truth is intensely practical for us today. First, it completely dispels the lie that certain people in our lives are just too far gone, too intellectual, or too prominent to ever be reached by the Gospel. How often do we look at our bosses, our highly educated coworkers, our wealthy neighbors, or our deeply skeptical family members and silently conclude, “They would never believe”? We fall into the trap of thinking that because they have an abundance of worldly influence or intelligence, they are somehow beyond the reach of the Holy Spirit. But Acts 13 reminds us that the Gospel penetrates every single stratum of society. No public figure is unreachable. No intellectual is too sophisticated. And no heart is too hardened for the piercing light of God’s Word. Our responsibility is not to pre-judge who is ready to listen. Our responsibility is to open our mouths with boldness and trust that the Spirit will do the work of opening hearts.

Finally, this text forces each of us to look squarely into the mirror and ask a deeply personal question: Are you still astonished at the teaching of the Lord? Or have you allowed the glorious, life-altering truths of the Gospel to become a boring, routine piece of background noise in your life? It is tragically easy to sit in a church week after week, intellectually nodding along to the story of the cross, while remaining completely unaffected by its cosmic weight. If your heart has grown cold, look back at the cross today. See the Savior who bore the blinding darkness of judgment so that you could walk in the light of eternal life. Let the truth of His substitutionary sacrifice shatter your complacency, break your pride, and fill you with the same profound delight that caused a Roman magistrate to bow the knee to the King of kings.

And when you bow your knee to the King, it changes absolutely everything about how you walk out of these doors and back into your everyday life. Tomorrow morning, when you step into your workplace, your classroom, or your neighborhood, you are not walking into neutral territory. You are entering a world where the spiritual tectonic plates that I mentioned at the start are still shifting, but you walk upon them as a chosen ambassador of a victorious Kingdom. You don’t have to look at the spiritual opposition in your family or the moral compromise in your industry and despair. The same Holy Spirit who went before Paul and Barnabas on the shores of Cyprus goes before you today. He is still piercing the darkness of human intellect and influence, and still opening the eyes of those we assume are completely beyond His reach. Our calling this week is simply to live in the light of that triumph, opening our mouths with bold faith and trusting that the Gospel remains the supreme power of God unto salvation.

But how do we sustain that bold faith? How do we prevent these life-altering truths from fading into the background noise of our boring routines? How do we keep from losing our holy astonishment?

Well, brothers and sisters, there is help right before us. God, in His infinite mercy, has not left us to survive on memory alone. He has given us a tangible, visible sermon wrapped in bread and cup. As we transition to the Lord’s Supper this morning, we are invited to look back at the cross and have our hearts re-ignited. Think about the profound irony we witnessed in Paphos: a deceitful sorcerer struck with a physical mist and blinding darkness as an act of divine judgment. There, the perfect Son of God voluntarily stepped into the ultimate, cosmic darkness of God’s wrath against our sin. He bore the blinding judgment we deserved, crying in the dark, so that our eyes could be opened to the light of His grace.

So, as you take this bread, which represents His broken body, and as you drink this cup, which represents His poured-out blood, let it shatter your complacency. Do not approach this table out of empty habit. Approach it to remember that the path to God was made straight through the sacrifice of Christ. Come with broken pride, come with deep repentance, but above all, come with a profound delight in the Savior.

If you have received the grace of His salvation—by trusting in Christ alone for your salvation, apart from anything you could contribute to earn it—then I invite you to join us. If you have not placed your faith in Jesus for this salvation, then this meal is not for you yet. But what it signifies is—the Saving work of Jesus. Instead of partaking in the bread and wine today, partake in Him through faith. Pray to Him. Confess your sin and need. Call upon His name to save you by His blood. And He will. He delights to do so. And for those of you who

know this, who have received this, then let's eat and drink together, freshly astonished by the grace and mercy the Savior extended to undeserving us.

Pray with me...

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<sup>1</sup> John Piper, "The Straight Paths of the Lord," accessed online at: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-straight-paths-of-the-lord>. R. C. Sproul describes this development as "the most significant missionary undertaking in the entire history of the church, indeed in the entire history of the world." R. C. Sproul, *Acts*, SAEC (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 222.

<sup>2</sup> Willie James Jennings, *Acts: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2017), 133.

<sup>3</sup> So also Patrick Scheiner, *Acts*, CSC (Holman Reference, 2021), 377; Sproul, 222; et al.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce Milne, *The Acts of the Apostles: Witnesses to Him...to the Ends of the Earth*, FBC (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2010), 283; cf. John W. Wade, *Acts: Unlocking the Scriptures for You*, SBC (Cincinnati: Standard, 1987), 134.

<sup>5</sup> As F. F. Bruce points out, "It was a practical expression of the principle laid down by Paul in Rom. 1:16—that the gospel should be presented 'to the Jew first.'" F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 247.

<sup>6</sup> David E. Garland, *Acts*, TTC (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 133.

<sup>7</sup> The word is used in Luke 1:2 for those "servants of the word," so teaching may be involved.

<sup>8</sup> This map was sourced at: <https://cyprusdiscovery.com/salamis-to-paphos-historic-routes/>.

<sup>9</sup> John D. Harvey and David Gentino, *Acts: A Commentary for Biblical Preaching and Teaching*, KC (Grand Rapids: Kregel Ministry, 2023), 309.

<sup>10</sup> This is also where Paul begins to establish himself, at least in Luke's narrative, as the leader of the group. As James Montgomery Boice explains: "If we look back to verse 2, we find the words 'Barnabas and Saul.' In verse 7, where Sergius Paulus sends for the two missionaries, it is the same: 'Barnabas and Saul.' Then, in verse 9, Saul becomes Paul. Verse 13 says, 'Paul and his companions.' Finally, in verse 42 we find the words 'Paul and Barnabas.' I think these changes signify that at the start Barnabas was the leader. He had been in the faith longer. He had been effective, recruiting Paul, for example. But the time came, as God worked sovereignly in these two lives, that Paul became the natural leader of this missionary team." James Montgomery Boice, *Acts: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 232.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Isa 40:3; 59:8; Mic 3:9; Hos 14:9; Prov 10:9.

<sup>12</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 560.

<sup>13</sup> Cyriacus Spangenberg, as quoted in Schreiner, 381.