



The Sons of God VS The Sons of Satan

Series: Acts -- Worldwide Witness to the Worth of Jesus Christ

Acts 13:1-12

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Today's text marks the church's full engagement in the mission of taking the Gospel to the Gentiles and Paul's emergence as the leading Apostle in the NT. It is a turning point in the history of the church from a primary focus on the Jews to a primary focus on Gentiles throughout the world. It is not that Jews will no longer be saved or that Paul will not preach in synagogues, but from this point forward, the vast majority of believers will be from the pagan Gentiles, fulfilling the promise of Jesus in Matthew 8 when He said, "I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 8:10–12, ESV) It is also a text that will show us the very real spiritual battle in which we are to be engaged, the power of the gospel to subdue all opposition, and the marked difference between the sons of God and the sons of Satan.

This is a story of church planting, of gospel missions, the story of God at work in the world and in the course of history to bring souls to salvation in Christ based upon his finished work on the cross. It is a great text; so let's get started by looking at the description that Luke gives us of

The Church at Antioch (1-3) We are already familiar with the details of the inception of the church in Antioch as we saw in chapter 11. It was a church that gave real evidence of the work of grace in its midst, real evidence of a desire for the Word of God. For a whole year, Barnabas and Paul met with the church, instructing them in truth, in doctrine, instructing them in the faith and saturating their minds with Christ. Above everything else, this church needed to be instructed in the Word of God, to have it applied in their lives and to be exhorted to faithfulness – to obedience, to prayer to worship in Spirit and in truth. The result was the word of God bore fruit in their souls and they lived out the doctrine they had been taught and they displayed a transformed heart – notably seen in their providing for the church in Jerusalem, in light of the

coming famine, prophesied by Agabus, by sending relief through their two leaders, Paul and Barnabas. They were first called Christians in Antioch because they were Christians, first, before they were anything else. What a church this was.

At the end of chapter 12, we are told: “And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark.” (Acts 12:25, ESV) That would be Mark, the writer of the Gospel that bears his name. In these first three verses, Luke gives us a description of the church: “Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen 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.” (Acts 13:1–3, ESV) The description of the church that Luke provides for us gives us some real insight into the nature and practice of this body of believers. First I want you to notice that God particularly blessed them with men who were gifted to be prophets and teachers. There is no real way to know whom in this list of men were prophets and which were teachers and I’m not sure it really matters. The gifting of prophet and teacher, as we understand them in Acts, both served the Lord by being ministers of His Word. Both of them spoke for God and sought to lead the church to know God through the teaching of His Word in truth. The main role of the prophets was to proclaim to the church direct revelation that they received from God – sometimes a prediction of a future event and other times a specific word of edification – building up, of exhortation – encouragement and urging, pressing them forward, or of consolation and comfort.

The main role of the teacher was to teach and explain and apply the Word of God to the life of the church and of the individual believers – instruction for effect. You can see how these gifts would easily and commonly overlap. The point is that this church had been blessed with and abundantly gifted church leadership, men who sought the face of God and who faithfully delivered the Word of God with no mixture of human wisdom and philosophy. They were men under authority, faithfully seeking the advance of God’s glory and the expansion of His kingdom and rule. The sense we get is that these men had a shared heart for the glory of Christ. There were no superstars in the church at Antioch. They could have all affirmed with Paul: “Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those

who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Corinthians 4:1–6, ESV) There is no devaluing that sort of gift to the church.

But there is something else I want you to see about this church. I want you to notice the very different background of each of these men mentioned. We know more about some of them than others, but this is a diverse group. Barnabas, formerly a Levitical priest, a Cypriot Jew had been a follower of Christ for about 14 years. Simeon, who was called Niger – that means black, was an African Hebrew, as was Lucius of Cyrene. Then you have Manaen, the foster brother of Herod Antipas, who against all human expectation became a disciple of Christ, and Saul of Tarsus, a Hebrew of the Hebrews who had been a Pharisee who once persecuted the church. This is diverse crew – symbolizing the ethnic and cultural diversity of this church but all of them united by the blood of Christ and the Spirit of God, all of them the sons of God demonstrating the power of the gospel to unite very different people with one heart.

So here we have a very different church than the exclusively Jewish Church in Jerusalem, but when we find them here in Antioch we find them doing the very same things that marked the church in Jerusalem. We find them worshipping the Lord, ministering to the Lord – that is the literally translation. Let me just say something about that. Ministering to the Lord can be kind of a confusing phrase. Since the word "minister" can bring to our minds the idea of "meeting needs," we can sometimes be a little confused by that concept. God has no needs to meet. So what does this mean?

There are several verses in the OT and NT that talk about this concept and we do not have time to look at all of them, but the common thread describing ministering to the Lord is acting in a way that demonstrates awe-filled recognition of the greatness and majesty of the character of God and of His gracious redemption of His people through His great acts. Ministering to God involve an obedient response to God's character and work, understanding who God is and what He has done, and gladly submitting to Him. As we live our lives in light of Who He is, we joyfully submit our wills and lives to the One who loved us enough to give His own life to reclaim us, rising from the dead, showing His power and authority over even death itself and we respond to His calling and leading with humility, reverence and obedience.

So, we see them worshipping – ministering to the Lord – and praying and fasting. Fasting is always accompanied with prayer. They are fasting – there is urgency in them to know God and to know His will. Fasting is always the mark of deep spiritual concern and urgency. They were willing to forego the normal demands of life in order to concentrate for a time on seeking God’s face in prayer, seeking His power and direction, seeking to know what it was that God would have them do as His people. It is a practice that has largely disappeared from the church, but I would say to you would be wise for us to return to as a body and especially in the evil age in which we live. I plan to talk to the elders about how we can incorporate this into our church.

Now why is all of this so important? Well, I want you too see that these men were serious about leading the church to be obedient to God. They are not coming up with their own ideas, not vision casting, or throwing a bunch of ideas on the wall to see what would stick, not reinventing the wheel, not strategically planning according to their own wisdom, not visioneering or any of that which seems so popular in our day. They are simply being obedient and searching out God’s heart in His word and through prayer and waiting for God to direct them. And it is in this context of their hearts and minds being postured toward God that the Spirit of the Lord sovereignly directs them in His purpose for them. They are busy doing what the church is about when the Holy Spirit speaks to them. “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” How did the Spirit speak – maybe through one of the men specifically or maybe according to a Spirit-driven consensus of their hearts, we don’t know for sure. But the Spirit speaks to them, saying in effect, “I have a sovereign purpose for Barnabas and Saul, a mission for them to accomplish, so set them apart, let them go from the fellowship, to do that for which I have called them.” What had the Spirit called them to? He doesn’t initially tell them. Their response is going to require faith similar to when God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees.

To their credit, the response of the church is immediate obedience. Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. After praying and fasting some more, realizing the gravity of what was taking place, they laid hands on the men, agreeing with God that this was their mission and the idea is that they committed themselves to supporting them in prayer and financially as they could, and sent them off. During this time of prayer and fasting, the Holy Spirit indicated the destination – the island of Cyprus.

Before we look at the ministry that took place there, I want to just draw your attention to a couple of things. First, I want you to see this mission was according to the Sovereign will of God –the church waited on His timing and His direction. Second they were willing to send out two of their most gifted men to do the mission – they didn't hoard the best servants of the Lord and give God their leftovers or send men who were unsuited to the rigors that were before them, but sent men fully mature in the Lord. Third, I want you to see that they sent 2 men, not 100. What I mean by that is that there is this theory going around today that if you are not on the mission field then you are somehow being disobedient or not living a radical enough life for Christ. Now I agree that, as John Piper puts it regarding missions, "There are only three possibilities in life: to be a goer, a sender, or disobedient." But I strongly reject the perception that every Christian is called to leave his or her native country and take the gospel to the nations. In your hometown – yes – every Christian is to be an evangelist. If you are not seeking to make Christ's name known where you are – deliberately doing that, not just as an aside, but purposefully making Christ known, then you are being disobedient. But this kind of mission work, to which Paul and Barnabas were called, demands a special calling from the Holy Spirit and requires spiritual gifts that not all believers possess. It's true in pastoral ministry as well. If you do not have a calling from the Lord, discouragement, disillusionment, and defeat are the inevitable result. It may be the very reason that John Mark turned back after what he witnessed in Cyprus. God sent out only two men from Antioch, but the impact they had was astounding. Perhaps the problem in missions is not sending out too few people as much as it is not sending out those whom God has called, and those whom the Spirit of God will empower and bless. Paul and Barnabas were called of God and they were called to

Spiritual Warfare in Cyprus (4-12) Let's read the whole account and then we will focus in on some particulars. "So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them. 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 Elymas 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. Then

the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.” (Acts 13:4–12, ESV)

Leaving Antioch on this first missionary trip which will take two years to complete from 47-49 AD, they went to the port of Seleucia and from there sailed to Cyprus, arriving in the coastal city of Salamis, taking with them, as their assistant John Mark. As was Paul’s custom, he preached first in the synagogue, taking the gospel to the Jews first, and then to the Gentiles. It may seem strange that Luke mentions no converts at all in Cyprus until they came to Paphos where they met two men – a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus, also known by his Greek name Elymas, and Sergius Paulus who was the proconsul of Rome, the governor over the Roman province of Cyprus. That does not mean that there were no converts – that’s not the point – it is just that Luke wants to point us to a very specific incident involving these two men.

What do we know about Bar-Jesus? Well, his name means “son of Jesus” or “son of salvation.” There is no slight irony in his name. He presented himself as follower of Christ, as a reliable guide to salvation, as a man who knew the things of God. In the Hebrew culture to call yourself a son of someone was to designate yourself his follower. When this man, therefore, called himself Bar-Jesus he was claiming that he was a follower of Jesus, but what he taught was absolutely contrary to what Jesus taught. He was, in reality, the first in a long line of liars who take to themselves the name of Jesus as a pretext for utterly un-Christian teaching.

And, as Luke describes, it was all a front. He was a Jewish false prophet, a liar and a fraud. Like all false prophets, he was concerned only for his own glory and power. He was one of those men of whom Peter would later write: “... there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies -- literally “they smuggle in” destructive heresies. They are deceptive, sneaky and undercover. They will smile then they will sneak in false doctrine in subtle ways, speaking in spiritual truisms, packaging their lies in clever, attractive and catchy messages but all with the end of damaging, destroying or preventing true faith in Christ. Even, as Peter continues, denying the Master who bought them –despite presenting themselves as part of the people of God, they deny the very Master, Jesus Christ, whom they supposedly serve. But as Peter says, they are bringing upon themselves swift destruction – they will not escape, as would be true of Bar-Jesus this very day. Peter continues, And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. Of course it makes sense that false teachers would be popular. They speak a message that flatters people rather than calling them to repentance and faith, a message that is spiritual and at the same time self-

serving, and that encourages people to exalt and satisfy themselves, to feed their fleshliness rather than calling them to discipleship and faithfulness, that provides a pseudo-religious veneer covering a self-permissive lifestyle, it is not surprising that many will follow. And it is not surprising that they cause the truth to be spoken against and mocked. Peter says, And in their greed they will exploit you with false words-- false teachers are driven by greed – greed for money, for honor, for prestige, for power, for acclaim and they are willing to exploit, to use people, for their own gain. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.” (2 Peter 2:1–3, ESV) -- Do not be fooled, judgment is coming. It will happen according to God's timing. Swift destruction is coming and when it comes, it will be with a ferocity that is awesome. So what we see is that this Bar-Jesus is a false prophet, a magician, a man well versed in the occult and the supernatural, but wholly devoid of the Holy Spirit. Think Grima Wormtongue in the Lord of the Rings.

What of Sergius Paulus? Sergius Paulus is described here as an “intelligent man.” That means more than that he was a smart guy. He is that but there is more to this. It means that he had a prepared and inquiring mind; he had a desire to know the truth and to hold to it, and that he would be able to discern between the truth that Paul and Barnabas would bring to him and the lies and deceit of Elymas. He is a man being drawn by God’s Spirit. And that is a great problem for Elymas. He sees his position, his power, his prestige, his access, his influence over Sergius Paulus, and his livelihood in grave danger. And his response is predictable -- Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.

And that sets up this confrontation between the sons of God and this son of Satan, the confrontation between the power of the gospel and the power of evil, between the power of divine truth to set free and demonic lies to enslave. And it is a confrontation that is hopelessly one-sided. Seeing the determined opposition of Elymas for what it is—satanic in nature, Paul speaks directly and forcefully.

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.” Wow, apparently Paul was absent from seminary the day they taught on tact, political correctness and interfaith dialogue. If a preacher spoke like that today, the response from many would be something like,

“That’s not very Christian of him,” and I suspect that the people who would say that know very little of what it truly means to be a Christian. Others would say that Paul was “not very loving,” but he is supremely loving in that he pursues the soul of Sergius Paulus and confronts Elymas with his damning sin. Paul is at war.

Paul doesn’t just “go off” here. This is a Spirit-inspired, Spirit-demanded response to this enemy of men’s souls. Looking at him with a laser focus, with a boldness born of deep conviction about Christ, born of confidence in the power of God, born of devotion to Jesus Christ, and born of fearlessness in the face of spiritual combat, he lays waste to Elymas. “You son of the devil” – he calls him what he is, not son of salvation, not son of Jesus, but a son and servant of Satan. “You enemy of all righteousness” – enemy of the cross, enemy of the blood of Jesus, enemy of the gospel, and enemy of Christ through whom righteousness with God can only be found. “Full of deceit and villainy” – he’s an unscrupulous and immoral liar, setting a snare for the souls of men. “Will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?” There is a straight path to the Lord -- Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God, born of a virgin, perfectly righteous, made sin for us, dying in our place, suffering our punishment and rising again on the third day for our justification. There is a straight path and Elymas was doing all he could to oppose it, to confuse and deter Sergius Paulus from faith and Paul would not have it. Elymas was an antichrist figure, doing the very opposite of God, actively resisting the work of the Holy Spirit.

We live in a time when many of those who profess to be preachers of Christ nevertheless believe that the message of Christianity should be flexible and indefinite, revealing a heart that is more in tune with the culture than with Christ and a heart in love with the spirit of the age rather than filled with the Spirit of Truth. Their “uncertainty” about the clear teaching of the Word of God is really a cloak for worldly living, unholy minds, ungodly behavior, and ecumenism. Many popular preachers of this age reject the transcendent nature of the Bible’s message and the gospel and instead pander to the consumer oriented mentality of this age. We are in an age of rapid production and propagation of heresy via TV, radio, Internet, books, magazines, seminars and blogs. Well-packaged deceit persuades multitudes to exchange truth for lies. What is worse, many in today’s church, some of them popular figures in the church, motivated by a fear of rejection or criticism, motivated by the seductiveness of tolerance, or by some unbiblical notion of love and unity are unwilling to expose today’s apostates. What a refreshingly gutsy and bold and truly pastoral contrast Paul is to these modern day cowards. Anyone or anything that keeps someone from receiving Christ is of the devil.

In fact, it is here that Paul began to truly exercise his apostleship, his authority in Christ, and it is here that the leadership shifts from Barnabas to Paul. Paul speaks the words: "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. Immediately he became in time what he already was spiritually – blind. He who had led so many astray, who attempted to keep Sergius Paulus on bondage and lead him into darkness went about seeking for others to lead him by the hand. What a stroke of divine justice.

Sergius Paulus is amazed, astonished at the power of God to crush Satanic opposition. But more than that: Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord. What astonished him was this combination of word and sign, of the apostle's teaching and power and the magician's defeat. But make no mistake, as astonishing as this judgment was, what caused him to believe was the teaching of the Lord, the truth of the gospel, God's Word, faithfully preached by Paul. He believed the truth and the truth set him free. Paul engaged the fight, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, Sergius Paulus was delivered from darkness into the marvelous light of the Kingdom of Christ. The son of the devil is no match for the Son of God, or the sons of God.

What do we take from this text?

Pastors, missionaries, the "prophets and teachers" of the church are eternally responsible before the Lord to be faithful. The responsibility of the pastors and elders is to guard the flock, to faithfully preach the word of God, and to lead and exhort the church to be faithful to its calling in this world. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Paul confronted evil with the gospel. Paul was on a mission. He had been called by the Holy Spirit, set apart with prayer and the laying on of hands, and sent into the world to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. He was not about to let some false prophet stand in the way of that. Thank God for Paul's courage, for his resolve, for his bravery to speak the truth even when it was unpopular. Thank God that he confronted evil with the gospel.

Anything that stands in the way of this gospel is evil and should be identified, named, and confronted with the truth. Whether it is another religion, a pseudo-Christian cult, government

opposition, political correctness, human philosophy, pseudo-science, or the suggestion that we should keep our faith to ourselves. We must even oppose our own fear, our own indifference, our own laziness, our own unwillingness to share the gospel, or to name the name of Christ. We need to confront it, name it, and call upon God to deal with it. For that reason,

The body of Christ must know gospel and its demands and live them out consistently. You must determine to know the gospel backwards and forwards. You must determine to know what pleases God according to His Word. You must determine to know what the church is about according to the Word of God. You must be willing to sacrifice your emotions or what seems right to you or what is pleasing to your flesh to the clear truth of the Word of God. You must be discerning with a mind renewed by the Word of God. It is not necessary for Paul only, or for the pastors, only or for the elders only, because “(Jesus) gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” (Ephesians 4:11–16, ESV) What that means is

The church is never to be idle and self-consumed. The church is never meant to be idle, to bask in the blessings that it has received, that we have received. The gospel is not meant to be preserved like some religious relic; it is meant to be preached. The church is never to satisfy itself with maintenance ministry, just holding on till Jesus comes but purposely engaging the culture with the good old true gospel. An idle church is a dead church. Jesus said to the church in Sardis: “ I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.” (Revelation 3:1–2, ESV) Clearly we can see then that

Missionary and evangelistic work is the responsibility of everyone in the church. When it comes to missions, you are either a sender or a goer and when it comes to evangelism, that is everybody’s business. It is not for the select few. Not having a heart for missions or a heart for evangelism is the same as not having a heart for Jesus Christ. It shows a horrible indifference to

what brought the Savior into the world and what drove Him to the cross. Evangelism and missions for the sake of His glory and the glory of His Christ, for the sake of worship, is the very heart of God. To be cold to this reveals a lack of care to what lies at the heart of God.

If the gospel is going to go forth in power, it must be a work of the Holy Spirit. In this dramatic power encounter, the power of the Holy Spirit utterly overthrows the power of Satan. The Apostle Paul, filled with the Spirit, overwhelms the false prophet and the gospel triumphs over the lie. Why did that happen, because the church understood who the Holy Spirit is and why He has been given to the church. The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal power but a person. He is not a power for us to use for personal gain and for our glory, but He is a person who uses us to make much of Christ, to empower His people for obedient gospel living, for effective gospel proclamation and for bold and compassionate ministry in the name of Jesus Christ. Calling someone to faith in Christ is not merely an academic exercise or a case of successful persuasion; it is all-out war against the forces of Hell and only one person and power is able to bring victory – the blessed Holy Spirit who does the will of the Father, who declares Christ, and who gives regeneration, repentance and faith to the lost. Last we need to see,

The gospel marches on in the face of all opposition because all opposition has been defeated at the Cross. The gospel is preached. The Holy Spirit moves in power. People are saved by believing in Jesus Christ and lives are transformed now and for eternity. But it is not without opposition. There is always somebody trying to stop the gospel. There is always somebody opposed to the forgiveness of sin, opposed to the promise of eternal life, opposed to the truth, opposed to goodness, mercy, faith, hope, and love.

Paul faced it and now two thousand years later, we face the same thing and still the gospel cannot be stopped. The great news about the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is not that there is no opposition to the gospel but that the gospel keeps on advancing despite the opposition and even in the very face of it. And why? Because the power of Satan and evil has already been defeated. That gives us great courage for the living of our lives, great confidence in the preaching of the gospel, and great hope for the future. Jesus Christ conquered the combined powers of sin, death, and evil in his death on the cross. The war has been won. We need to know this, to remember it, and to hold fast to it every day.

Do you see the great power of the gospel, empowered by the Holy Spirit that has been entrusted to you? Once and for all, let us quiet all thoughts of defeatism, or holding on till Jesus comes, and let us commit ourselves to dispel and defeat this present darkness by the undefeated light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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