

Acts 12.25- Acts 13.49

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[0:00] It is too distracting for everyone. Wonderful. Well, then we'll do this instead, which leaves me less hands to wave around, which is tricky.

! We're going to be in Acts chapter 13, actually. We're just going to start in the last verse of chapter 12. So we're kind of picking up on the story. It's a few weeks since we were last with it, but picking up on the story.

Paul and Barnabas have been down to Jerusalem, taking a collection of money for the poor from Antioch. They've taken it to Jerusalem, and they're on their way back. This is Acts 12, verse 25. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark. That's the John who writes the Gospel of Mark, who comes up a few times in this story, but will be important in a few chapters' time.

So hold them in the back of your head for the autumn, if you can. And then I'll carry on. Now, there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon, who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Menaion, a lifelong friend of Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul.

[1:10] While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.

Then after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off. So they've come back, having gone to Jerusalem with this money for the poor, and they come back to their church team that the two of them are part of, led by a group that Luke calls here prophets and teachers. People of all different kinds of social statuses from all different parts of the world. In fact, none of them probably from Antioch. I should probably just explain, because some of you, you'll have read it, Barnabas, Simeon, who was called Niger, and having read that word, you will then have stopped and not been able to see anything else.

Because it looks remarkably like a slur that we would not want to say. So it is just the Latin word for black, and it may or may not have been a reference to his skin colour.

It was quite a common thing for Romans to call each other. To be honest, he might have been a black man, he might have had black hair. It was not rude in the way that it might feel in contemporary culture.

[2:20] So we have Simeon, we've got Lucius from Cyrene, so he is definitely an African, that's in Libya. We've got Menaion, a lifelong friend of Herod the Tetrarch, which is weird, right? This is the Herod who chopped John the Baptist's head off, and the Herod who was at Jesus' trial.

And his lifelong friend has now become a Christian and is a leader at a church in Antioch. And Saul, this guy who, as we know, has spent an early part of his life trying to kill every Christian he possibly could, and has, in the last kind of decade or so, become a teacher of the word among them.

And they're there, they're gathered, they are worshipping and fasting, and therefore, they are sent. Those two things are connected.

I wonder if your expectation, when you gather with people to worship and pray, or if you fast at the same time, is that something will happen.

Maybe you might get sent. I wonder if that's your expectation, as we've come together this morning to worship the Lord, and we have indeed been worshipping the Lord, in song and in prayers, that something might happen to you, that it might, in some fashion, change things for you.

[3:40] Maybe you might be sent. Because this is what we should expect when we pray. You talk to the Most High God, who has a mission to change the cosmos into his own image.

Funnily enough, he might ask you to join in with it. And especially when we pray with others, we should expect that, oh, things will shift when we pray, when we worship, when we fast.

This is normal church life, that you would essentially have a prayer meeting, and then go, oh, we should go church planting all across the nations.

That should be normal church life. And in fact, there's a dynamic going on in these verses that happens every Sunday, that I wonder if we're aware of it.

What happens when we worship God, and we give, particularly when we give thanks, is that we find ourselves in the presence of the Holy Spirit. That's not incidental.

[4 : 45] If you were with us at the weekend over on Graham and Sue's farm last weekend, on the Saturday evening, we had a little time of worship together under a tree, and Graham prayed this beautiful prayer of thanks, and then suddenly it was like God was in, not in the room, because we weren't in the room, but God was in the field, those things are connected.

That he would pray thanks naturally, because what happens is all our hearts join in with the thanks, and then we find our attention directed to God, and then we will encounter the Holy Spirit.

So that happens to them. They're worshipping the Lord. They're not asking God for stuff. They're worshipping the Lord, and then the Holy Spirit talks to them. That's how it works.

That's what we're trying to do on a Sunday. We direct our worship to God, because he's worthy of it. But our expectation when we do so, is that the Spirit will come to us, and speak with us, and encourage us, and admonish us, and send us, and all the other wonderful things that he does.

So that's what happens. They worship, the Spirit comes, and then they're sent. Now they're slightly slow about it. That's healthy.

[5 : 59] You notice that again in verse 3, then after fasting and praying, as in more, they lay their hands and send them off. So they worship, they hear God, and they're like, we need to weigh this. We need to check out that this is what we've all heard.

We're not the kind of loose canons who say, God has said, and I am going, even if everyone that you talk to says, are you mad? They instead, they weigh it.

Now together, because they're praying together, they do it together. If you feel you hear from God on your own, it's wise to talk to trusted friends, and say, I think I've heard this from God. What do you think? And they can help you figure out, how do you test it, and then try and be open-hearted, and follow what the Lord is saying to you.

So again, they wait, they wait, they fast and pray again, and then they're like, oh, I think we've got to go. Lay hands on them, and they send them. That's how it works.

It's actually how it works all the time. So I was praying with some guys earlier this week, and A.D. Ward prayed this beautiful kind of prophetic prayer about, he was in his work uniform, because it was before work, and he prayed this beautiful prophetic prayer about the way that we are given royal robes to wear by Jesus, and we kind of take them with us wherever we go, as though the presence of God that we encounter when we worship and pray together goes with us, because that's who we are.

[7 : 23] It's almost like we're just naturally sent, because God kind of comes along with us wherever we go, and then we find that wherever we are, we take the presence of God with us, and he goes ahead of us.

That's normal church life. We're not ecstatic people. You might be like, well, we come and sit in the building every Sunday. Sure. But we're not ecstatic people.

We're nomads. That's how the church has always been. We go where God sends us. We might think particularly of our dear brother Vinny, sat down here, who we are about to send to plant the church in Portugal.

And you might think, oh, that's just a thing for like super Christians like Vinny. You feeling like a super Christian this morning? No. Okay. But it's not.

We're all sent. Now, that doesn't mean we all need to get on a plane and go to Portugal. That isn't the message. But we are all sent. Some of us will be sent to the ends of the world. Some of us will be sent to the ends of the street.

[8 : 24] Some of us might be sent across the room. But we are sent. Church is not a nice Christian club that we come to. This is the kind of mission house of God.

We come in. We worship. We're filled with the Spirit. He says, do this. And we go, I don't know how. And he says, try anyway. And off we go. So what do they do?

What do they do? Verse 4. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, just like you are, 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'd 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.

[9 : 24] But Elemas, 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.

I need to be slightly careful where I look while I do this. But looked intently at him and said, forgive me, Graham. 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 God? 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. Saul and Barnabas, they're sent.

[10 : 30] They crack on to Cyprus, which is where Barnabas is from, where lots of churches have already been planted because Cypriot Christians came and planted the church in Antioch that they're in. But they travel around, presumably to encourage them, and they also go to each synagogue to encourage Jewish people to come and follow Jesus.

And eventually, they're heard of by Sergius Paulus, who's essentially the Roman governor of the island, so he's the most important guy around. I guess because he's curious.

And he just wants to know what's going on. He'd like to hear what the message is that they're saying. And he has with him this magician, Elimus Bar-Jesus, which just means son of Joshua, which is a fairly common name.

It is interesting, though, that we're told his surname is son of Jesus, and the first thing Paul says to him is, you are a son of the devil. And through this encounter, presumably he hears the message too, but through this encounter of power, where this strange wizard is struck blind, Sergius Paulus converts.

It seems, believes, and becomes a Christian. We don't really know much about him later, until about 25 years later, he becomes consul of Rome, which is the two people who have the most power under the emperor, which is surprising that a Christian would get that role.

[11 : 55] We don't know what happened to him. We don't know if he's still a believer then. But this man of influence and authority is curious. He becomes a Christian.

And we assume he rules justly as a result. But in the mix of it, there's this encounter with dark powers that Paul opposes.

Let's keep going. So this is verse 13, if you've got the Bible open. Now, Paul and his companions. Oh, he's changed name. Suddenly Saul is Paul. That, in English they rhyme, and we find it a bit strange.

They don't really rhyme in the original languages. Paul is his Roman name. So he's moving into Roman places. He's stopped using his Hebrew name. He's using his Roman name. Now, Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia.

And John left them and returned to Jerusalem. But they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. So this is a different Antioch from the one they first came from, but they have the same name.

[12 : 59] And on the Sabbath day, they went into the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them saying, Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it.

So Paul stood up and motioning with his hand said, let me pause there. So they've arrived at this place. Pisidian Antioch. It is a middling, probably quite small town of local importance that no one's heard of outside of the small settlements that kind of consider it important around it in kind of southern Turkey.

So think a little bit like Alton, I suppose. And they've gone into the synagogue and they've sat down to see what's going on. And the Bible's been opened and read. And then someone beforehand has

asked, who are these guys?

And they figured out that Saul is a learned man who trained with the foremost teacher of the Old Testament in his day, Gamaliel, in Jerusalem. And they're like, oh gosh, he should preach, not me. And they basically, they go and essentially give him the microphone and say, could you preach today? Which is less strange there than it would be here. And then he goes, all right. And then he opens up the Bible to them, and I'll read it to you in a second, to essentially tell them all the readings they've just heard are about Jesus.

[14 : 14] So what I'm going to do is I'm going to read you his sermon. It's reasonably long, so stick with me. And then we're going to pull out a few points. Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen.

The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt. And with uplifted arm, he led them out of it.

And for about 40 years, he put up with them in the wilderness. And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance.

All of this took about 450 years. And after that, he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul, the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin for 40 years.

And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, I have found in David, the son of Jesse, a man after my heart who will do all my will.

[15 : 26] Of this man's offspring, God has brought to Israel a savior, Jesus, as he promised. Before his coming, John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.

And as John was finishing his course, he said, What do you suppose that I am? I'm not he. No. But behold, after me one is coming, the sandals whose feet I am not worthy to untie.

So just to recap there, what Paul does is he tells them the story of Israel, particularly which they know well, particularly highlighting David the king. And I'll carry on.

Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him, nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him.

And though they had found in him no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed. And when they carried out all that is written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb.

[16 : 43] But God raised him from the dead. And for many days, he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people.

And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us, their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm.

You are my son. Today I have begotten you. And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption. He has spoken in this way. I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.

Therefore, he says also in another Psalm, you will not let your holy ones see corruption. For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption.

But he whom God raised up did not see corruption. Let it be known to you, therefore, brothers, that though through this man, forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.

[17 : 45] And by him, everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. Wow. Beware, therefore, lest what it is said in the prophet should come about.

Look, you scoffers, be astounded and perish. For I am doing a work in your days, a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you.

As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told in the next Sabbath. And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.

The next Sabbath, almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him.

And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, it was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.

[19 : 07] For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you might bring salvation to the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord.

And as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. This is the word of the Lord. So what's going on?

Paul tells them the big story of Israel. And then as the story goes on, we discover that it's not just for the people of Israel, for the Jews. What they call Gentiles, which just means non-Jewish people, so most people in this room, are also invited in to the story of Israel's God.

You get to join Israel's story. That's how the Old Testament becomes our story.

The Gentiles get to join the covenant. God is faithful to Israel and her king. That's Paul's main point.

[20 : 14] God is faithful to Israel. Now, there was a king called Saul who wasn't very good, intriguingly, from the same tribe as this Saul. And they have essentially inverted lives. Saul, the king starts off well, ends off bad.

This Saul starts off killing Christians, ends off following the Lord. That's not incidental. That's deliberate. But this bad king Saul is followed by this good king David. But they're promised that he will have a great son.

He does Solomon, he's all right. But then one day, a much better son will come who is kind of the final king in the line of David. That there won't be any more, implying he won't die.

God is faithful to Israel and her king. That's what Paul wants the people to know. Who's her king?

He says Jesus is Israel's king. And therefore Israel is whoever Jesus' people are.

Paul makes this point at great length in his letters. That what the church is, is people who've been joined in to the grand story of Israel. We're the Israel of God.

[21 : 21] What does that mean for you? Well, firstly, that means the Old Testament is your story. Even if it doesn't feel like it. It's your story. And it's about Jesus.

As Paul starts to show us when he quotes little snippets that you may or may not recognize from the Old Testament and says, that's Jesus. That is every single time. But it also is the way that he preaches the gospel.

And what I'd like to very briefly show you is the gospel in the five steps that Paul makes. The first one, he starts up equating Psalm 2. You are my son.

Today I have begotten you. There is a son of a father who is eternally begotten, not made.

That's Jesus. The eternal son of the father, begotten, not made. And he's sent to us. God comes to you.

[22 : 24] You didn't earn it. It's not because you're special. It's not because he saw anything particularly wonderfully new except that he loved you and so he chose to come to you, this eternal son of the father.

Second step. I, though he quotes from Isaiah, I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David. Second step is, there's a promised king like David and it's Jesus. So this son who comes eternally from the father is also this king like David, David, which means he's your king and the king of the world.

He's here to rule in your life. So not only is he sent to you, he gets to send you. Third step. Third thing he quotes, back to the psalm, Psalm 16.

You will not let your holy ones see corruption. And by this he means like the body won't decay. He means it very literally. So there will be, this holy one is going to be someone who is raised from death so that their body doesn't decompose.

So there's a holy one, a priest, who will be resurrected. Hang on. So this son from the father who's a king is also a priest and he's going to rise from the dead.

[23 : 36] Which means, dear friends, that you get to rise because he did. That as we've sung about and celebrated this morning, death becomes a doorway that you can walk through because Jesus has gone out the back of death punching a hole in it.

And that every time you die in some small metaphorical way in your life, Jesus promises you will rise. That everything that dies in Christ comes to life.

That life follows death and that that's the order of the universe not the other way around. So we've got a son of the father who's a king and a priest who rises from the dead.

Fourth thing, verse 38, let it be known to you therefore brothers that through this man, this son king priest, forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which they could not be freed by the law of Moses.

So, you get forgiveness, that's having your burdens lifted off you and you get justification, that's being told that you are in the right despite everything seeming to point to the contrary.

[24 : 44] which means you're free from who you were and you're free from what you did which means you're free to be sent. This sent one who has the right to send you and is going to raise you from the dead on the way has also freed you from everything so you can go.

Fifth thing, what we saw back in the earlier story in Cyprus, Paul doesn't preach it now, is that this gospel also includes defeat of evil powers. So, Jesus on the cross did the enemy in.

We're just waiting for his foot to slam all the way down at the end of all things. Everything that is evil loses when Jesus looks at it which means that you are also free from the paths of darkness.

There will be opposition as you're sent but it'll lose which means you're also free to go. And then Paul gives them two responses. He quotes from one of the prophets.

It says, you can scoff at this or, and as they do, he then quotes from another from Isaiah. It says, or you can go to the ends of the earth.

[25 : 55] And essentially those are your responses to the gospel. You can scoff or you can go to the ends of the earth. You can be static or you can be sent. Even all the way to the ends of the earth to this particular little rainy rock that we live on right at the edge of the map.

It took them about 500 years to get here. But they did. And as a result we know Jesus. The gospel sends you because Jesus sends you.

He was sent and so he sends you. Maybe to tell your neighbor about Jesus. Maybe to be a kingdom presence in wherever you find yourself to do your work in a godly way.

Maybe to be the church. To go and talk to someone that you don't know. In fact, all three of those. He sends you. Because he is sent, we are rescued.

Because we receive from him, we are sent. Can I have the band? what we are going to do friends is we are going to worship this Jesus who sends us.

[27 : 11] Who is for us. Why don't you stand with me if you are able. I will pray and then the band will lead us. Lord Jesus, we are so grateful because you didn't have to do any of that.

You choose to come and get us to lift off our burdens, to raise us from the dead, to make yourself our king and then to allow us to participate in everything that you are doing in the world.

Wow. We are so grateful. Forgive us when we are scared. Forgive us when we are complacent. Forgive us when we treat church like some kind of cozy club.

Stir our hearts again to be sent into the world. Where are you sending us today Jesus? There will be hundreds of ways but what is the specific thing to each of us you are saying hang on you have forgotten about you need to do this.

Where are you calling us? As we give thanks to you Jesus please would you come by your spirit and start to speak with us but we do want to thank you.

[28 : 28] We are so grateful. Amen.