



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Acts 13:1-12

Acts

"Dawn for the Nation"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] If you notice in your announcements, we have a book by Martin Luther for the month of July. The July book of the month is *the Bondage of the Will*. That's Luther's magnum opus. I just finished reading it about a month ago. I read it back in seminary, but that was some 25 years go and I decided to read it again, so I read it along with a book on Luther's theology and profited greatly from it, enjoyed it. I recommend it to you. You ought to read the classics such as that, and that's a good one to begin with. If you haven't read it, get a hold of it and read Luther's *Bondage of the Will*. You might find it difficult in parts, but that's okay. It's always good to be challenged a little bit in our thinking.

Well, we'll try to do that with our text, which is Acts chapter 13. Now we're going to look this morning at verses 1-12. Paul and Barnabas had been to Jerusalem. They had taken a gift for the famine relief. There was a famine, you'll remember, that Agabus the prophet foretold that would come upon the Roman world. And so out of concern for the believers in the mother church in Jerusalem, they sent a gift. Paul - or Saul - and Barnabas took it down to them and they returned with John Mark. And now we read in verse 13 there - or rather, in chapter - chapter 13 in verse 1 - verse 1 of chapter - right here in the text.

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

and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were ministering to 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, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

"So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. When they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogue of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper. When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet who same was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him and said, 'You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time.' And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord."

May the Lord bless this reading of His word in our time of study together. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for this time together. It is a blessing to gather together with the saints, with the believers of Jesus Christ, both young and old, who are the recipients of Your sovereign grace and we do thank you for that. We learn about that from our text, how You send out Your word and how You gather your saints to Yourself, Your people, Your sheep who are scattered abroad, and You bring them to a knowledge of Yourself and into Your family, making

them recipients of eternal life, and that is what we are, who have believed in Jesus Christ. We have received grace from You. We have life everlasting. We have an inheritance that cannot fade away. And Father, that should put all of life in perspective.

We face difficulties in life. We always will. Life is not easy, and it's not easy for the Christian. We face struggles. We see that in our text this morning. But all things are working together for our good and they will all issue into that great day when we are in Your presence forever and forever, and we will enjoy the sight of Your Son and we will experience joy unimaginable that will never end.

Well, Father, we pray that You'd give us perspective with that truth and that You would bless us as we study our text this morning and that You will teach us what You would have us to learn. We are a blessed people. We not only possess the word of God, which is an inherent, which is Your mind revealed to us, that speaks to us about Yourself and about ourselves. We have a good teacher. We have a perfect teacher in the Holy Spirit, whose presence in our lives, who is the seal upon our heart, who literally dwells within us and is our guide and our protector and our teacher, and we pray that His ministry would go unhindered this morning, that our hearts would be open to Your truth and that the Spirit of God would guide us in our thinking and build us up in the faith. We know that He will. You have promised us in the book of Isaiah that when Your word goes forth it will not return to You empty and it will not return empty this morning. We pray to be built up in the faith.

Bless us materially, physically as well, Father. We thank You for all the gifts You give us. You bless us abundantly beyond all that we ask or think. Every good and perfect gift comes down from above and we enjoy much. We enjoy it so much, so frequently, so regularly, that we often forget that it comes from You and we take things for granted. May we not do that. May we be grateful men and women and thank You for all that You've given us.

We thank You for this time together. We pray You'd bless it. We pray that You would bless our time together this evening when we return and celebrate the Lord's supper and remember His first coming and His death for us, and remember that He's coming again. Bless us then, bless us now, bless us as we sing our final hymn. May it prepare us well for a time of study together. We pray in Christ name. Amen.

[Message] We are all familiar with expressions like "Christian lambs" and "a Christian nation," or "our Christian heritage," expressions that apply to the western countries of Europe and America, and expressions that may suggest some satisfaction or even pride in ourselves and our past, but expressions that are less true than many might want to believe.

The west, it is true, has been greatly blessed with the light of the gospel. But it's not always been so. Our heritage is really not Christian at all. It's pagan. Benjamin Disraeli, the Primary Minister of England during Victoria's reign put things in proper perspective when he responded to the anti-semantic taunt of a political opponent. He said, "Yes, I am a Jew, and when the ancestors of the right honorable gentleman were brutal savages in an unknown island, mine were priests in the temple of Solomon." Now that's a heritage. And ours might still be that of savages in the wild west and not the gospel come to our ancestors. They were to borrow from Wesley's hymn, "Fast bound in sin and nature's night."

But the gospel did come, and with it came a spiritual dawn for the nations. That is the story of Acts 13. It is a turning point in the book of Acts. It begins a new section in the book with the account of a new outward expansion of the gospel. Up to this point, the activity of the church has mainly been in the regions of Judea and Samaria, and it has largely been a mission to the Jews. During this time the foundations of the church had been laid.

But Jesus also told His disciples to go beyond Judea and Samaria and be His witnesses to the remotest part of the earth. In other words, go out and preach the gospel to the Gentiles. A few

people had a vision for that. Some Jewish travelers to Antioch began speaking to Greeks. We saw that back in chapter 11, and the result of that is a church was established there in Antioch. It grew in size. It also grew in importance, so that when we come to chapter 13 of the book of Acts, the center of Christian activity has shifted from Jerusalem to Antioch. And it is there at the church of Antioch that the mission of the church widens to include the whole world. A new work begins with a new leading figure.

In the first part of the book, the first 12 chapters, the leading figure of the book was the apostle Peter. We saw him on the day of Pentecost in chapter 2. We'd seen him preach in various places - in the household of Cornelius in chapter 12; we saw last week his release from prison. He has been the leading figure throughout the first part of this book.

Now it changes. Now it will be Paul as he goes out on his missionary journeys and preaches the gospel to the Gentiles in the western lands. The church of Antioch was well suited to be the springboard for world missions. We get a sense of that from the description given of his ministers in verse 1. It was well taught. Apparently it was well integrated, a kind of microcosm, a cross-section of the world and of the universal church, because the church is composed of all kinds of people from all walks of life, some from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and we get a sense of that from the five men whom Luke lists here in verse 1. They are identified as prophets and teachers and they were remarkable men. At least two of them were. The first and the last we are already familiar with - Barnabas and Saul.

The other three are not known to us, but we would certainly like to know more about them. And so speculation has grown up around these men. For example, the second listed, Simeon who was called Niger, has been the subject of a lot of speculation. His Latin nickname, Niger, means black, suggesting that he was a man of black skin. Some have thought that he might have been Simon of Cyrene,

who carried the Lord's cross up to Calvary. That's not likely, but he may have been an African. Antioch was a cosmopolitan town.

The next man listed was from Cyrene, in North Africa. He was Lucius. And since it was men from Cyprus and Cyrene who first brought the gospel to Antioch and spoke to the Greeks, Lucius may have been one of those original missionaries. If so, he stayed on to continue to minister to the church there and he helped it to grow strong. Lucius is a Latin name and was a common name in the Roman world.

So he was evidently a man who was raised in a Roman culture. We have a cross-section of people here. We have a Jewish man, this three that we know of for sure; probably four. They have possibly an African man. We have one who is of a Roman culture, Lucius. And then the fourth leader is particularly interesting - Manaen, who is described as having been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, which is a reference to Herod Antipas. He's the Herod that we're familiar with from the gospels. He was the youngest son of Herod the Great. He ruled Galilee during the Lord's ministry. He beheaded John the Baptist. It was before this Herod that the Lord stood during His trial. He's the man who Jesus called that fox.

Well, Manaen grew up with him. He was an adopted brother, or a foster brother, and a royal prince. He knew Herod, knew him as a brother, knew him quite well. So Manaen was probably the source for much of the information that Luke was given about the Herod family. And he is also an illustration of the mystery of divine grace. It is sovereign. Two boys grow up together in the same household. They are subject to the same influences. One obtains as a Christian leader, the other dishonor for his disgraceful life. One is saved, the other is lost, like Jacob and Esau. He does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy, Romans 9:16.

Manaen is a monument to that. He's a monument to God's sovereign grace and he is a reminder of the power of the gospel. In this context, I can't help but think of the gospel as being like the

lizard that so fascinated Solomon in Proverbs 30:28. He said that you can grab the lizard with the hand, "yet it is in kings' palaces." You can't keep it out. You can catch them. And if You've been to Jerusalem, you know that there are lizards on the stone walls and on the buildings, and no doubt in Solomon's day he found many of them on the walls of his palace. He could grab them, but he could not keep them out.

And they find their ways into the most guarded and secure of all places. Well, that is very much the way it is with the gospel. It goes where it wishes. It cannot be kept out. It even goes into the most guarded places, because it goes where God wills it to go. It entered into Herod's palace. Later on Paul will write to the Philippians from Rome and send them greetings from Caesar's household.

Men think that they can crush the gospel. They think that they can snuff it out, that they might grab it like they grab a lizard, but they can't do that. They can't restrain it. It even gets into kings' palaces. That's grace. That's sovereign irresistible grace. That's the gospel. God directs it where He wills it to go and it goes there with great effect. It entered the household of Herod himself and it saved this man Manaen. In fact, all of these leaders of the church of Antioch had been blessed with grace. In fact, they'd been blessed with grace upon grace, because they not only had received the greatest gift of all, salvation, eternal life, but they'd received great gift. They were prophets and teachers.

Now, these are spiritual gifts. These are not offices in the church. There are four offices in the church. The first belongs to church. He is the great shepherd of the sheep. He is the leader. He is the one who guides us. The next office is that of elder, or undershepherd. There are a **paralyty** of these. Elders do pastoral work, but no one elder is the pastor of the church. And it's not an office in the church. That is what Christ is. He is the pastor. He is the great shepherd of the sheep. Elders give spiritual guidance. They give

oversight spiritually for the church, but they do that under the Lord's headship.

And they do that, they minister with the help of deacons. That's the third office. Not everyone is an elder. Not everyone is a deacon. In fact, none of these five men is identified as either an elder or a deacon. They were gifted men, who with their gifts served the body of Christ. And all of us can do that in some way, because all of us are believer priests, and that is the fourth office of the church.

Christ has made us a kingdom of priests. And we all have a spiritual service to perform. He has given each of us a gift so that we can do that, and He will supply the grace to do it effectively. The pattern for ministry in the church has always been an every-member ministry. It is not a one-man ministry. That's how the church functions as a body, everyone doing his or her part. Every one of us has a function to perform, just as every member of the body has its important function to perform. There are no idle members of the body, not when a body is healthy and is functioning normally, and that is the case with the local church. Every one of us are to be participating in its activity, in its ministry. We all have a part to play.

Now that's suggested here with these five men. It is not one man carrying the load. We have five men here who were gifted, either as prophets or as teachers. Prophets were given to the church to give divine revelation. This was a time when there was no New Testament. They had the Old Testament. They had the first books of the Bible, but the writings of the new covenant, the New Testament, had not yet begun. There were no letters, there were no gospels, but they had prophets to give God's direction and God's word. So the prophets gave the revelation of God and then God supplied the church with teachers to explain that revelation.

Now we read in verse that they were using their gifts. They were ministering to the Lord and fasting, which probably describes service at the meeting of the church. That's suggested by that word "ministering," because it has the significance of serving in a priestly

way in regard to worship. It's used, for example, in Luke 1:23 of the priestly service at the temple.

So it was during the meeting of the church while they were worshipping that we read the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart from Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." It was a new and urgent directive from God and one that gives us a glimpse into the meeting of the early church, as well as some important principles for Christian living.

What it tells us about the church meeting is that it was structured such a way that it was open to the governing activity of the Spirit. The church celebrated the Lord's supper weekly and exercised its gifts. Paul gives a description of the meeting of the church in 1 Corinthians 14:26. When they came together he writes everyone had a psalm or a revelation, a prophecy, and an interpretation, much the way we meet on Sunday evenings here when we celebrate the Lord's supper and various men who are gifted to do so stand and speak, or some stand and pray or ask for a hymn. So it has structure, but also flexibility.

And on this occasion one of the prophets stood and gave a divine utterance. It don't say that a prophet stood, but the word of God came and that seems the most likely way in which it would have come in light of the structure of the early church met. He stood and gave this utterance at the direction of the Holy Spirit, who directed the leaders of the church to set apart Barnabas and Saul for a special work.

That gives us some insight into how the Holy Spirit leads His people, which is always a concern of Christians, knowing the will of God. And what is clear from this incident is we learn the will of God from the word of God. He gave the church revelation and we have that revelation now fully in the Bible. The Bible was in the process of being finished in this day. It is completed in our day. The Canon is closed and we have His revelation and it is sufficient for our daily lives.

It's often been said that the evangelical church today doesn't seem to have a difficulty with the fact that the Bible is God's inherent word. We talked to the average evangelical Christian, they will say, "Yes, I believe that the Bible is inherent. I believe it's God's word." The problem is that men today, people today, don't think that it is sufficient for their daily lives. It's inspired, but it's not sufficient. And yet the fact is that the word of God is sufficient, absolutely sufficient for our daily lives. Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. And we learn God's word and God's will through study. We learn it through personal study. We learn it by picking it up daily and reading it and pondering it and thinking about it, and we learn it as it is ministered to us during the meeting of the church.

That's how it happened in Antioch. The Lord speaks to us in the way. He gives understanding and He gives inner conviction about issues through the ministry of His word. You want to hear God's voice? Do you want God to speak to You? Well, of course you do. I know that you want to hear the voice of God, but if you want to hear the voice of God, then you have to be where that voice is and His voice is in the Scriptures. It's under the ministry of His word and with His people when they worship. That's where He gives us understanding and inner conviction about issues and direction.

So we're to be where His voice is, where we hear His word, and we are to be doing what we should be doing. It's worth noting that Paul and Barnabas were doing that. They weren't idle men. They weren't puzzling over the will of God for their lives and wondering about their futures. We often do that. We wonder what does God want me to do next year? What does He want me to do next month? What does He want me to do tomorrow? And we can agonize over that.

Well, they weren't doing that. They were active in the present. They weren't worried so much about the future. Their concern was for what they should be doing today with the responsibilities that were theirs, and so they were ministers. So they knew what God's will was

for them that day. It's what had been for them the previous Lord's day for the past two years and they were carrying on their ministry, and it is as we are doing that, as we are doing faithful in the things of the Lord, serving where we have opportunities, whether it be in your family as a loving husband or wife, or as a good parent, or as a good child and student, or as a diligent worker at work, or as in this place carrying out the ministry that you have and the opportunities you have. It's as we do that, as we take the opportunities that we have, as we carry out the responsibilities that are ours that God opens doors and sometimes unexpectedly for further service.

That's what He did in this case. That's what He did with Saul and Barnabas. They went about their business, doing what they had done every week, what was expected of them, what they desired to do, serving the Lord, and God opened a door for them. He directed the leaders to set them apart.

Well, in response to what was clearly the will of God, the church sent Paul and Barnabas off with their blessings. They prayed for them and laid their hands on them. Now that didn't invest these two men with authority. They had that authority already. They had been ministering there in Antioch for some two years. This was not an ordination ceremony. And they had this authority to go forth on this mission from the Lord Himself. He commissioned them. This was a divine commission.

But what they had done, what the church had done in this meeting, was identify with their mission. By laying their hands upon them, they were signifying that they identified with them that they supported them in that mission. Not everyone can go, but everyone can have a part in those who do go. They can support them through their prayers, as the church of Antioch supported these two missionaries.

That's one way that you share in the ministry of this church and the ministry of this pulpit. Your prayers are instrumental in the faithfulness and the effectiveness of this ministry. I often hear from

you that you pray for me daily, and I must say that is one of the strongest encouragements that I receive. And it is the prayers of the saints that will keep a ministry such as this faithful and strong. This church needs the prayers of the saints. The elders need the prayers of the saints. The deacons, the teachers, we all need the prayers of one another to be built up in the faith and strengthened in that way. That's your ministry.

Well, it's the ministry that this church had with Saul and Barnabas, and it was with prayer that the church sent them off. But now notice verse 4. They left Antioch, "being sent out by the Holy Spirit." The church sent them, but the Spirit sent them. There's no confusion here. There is no contradiction between the two statements. The words for sinned are different from one another. In verse 3, the word really means "to release," and that's what the church did. It released Paul and Barnabas from the ministry in Antioch to go on their mission abroad. It was the Spirit who sent them out. It was the Lord's initiative to the Gentiles, His mission, His work. It had to be that if it were to be successful. Had Barnabas and Saul gone out on their own or in the authority of the church alone, well, their mission would have come to nothing.

Successful ministry is the Lord's doing. So as a church and as individuals, we must be very sensitive to the Lord's leading, to His sending, His direction. And we can go out with the knowledge of that with great confidence, because nothing, nothing, can stand in His way. We saw that in chapter 12 with Peter's deliverance from prison. His chains fell off, he passed by the guards, and the iron gates swung open for him. That's the power of God. That's what the Lord promised His disciples. Before sending them out to the far reaches of the earth, he said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you."

Well, the Holy Spirit has come upon you the moment of faith. You're sealed with the Spirit. The Christian lives in the power of the Holy Spirit, and that is power that opens iron gates. And it is with that

confidence, the confidence that the Holy Spirit was in them, that He was directing them, that He was guiding them, that Barnabas and Saul left Antioch as missionaries.

They went down to the port of Seleucia and they sailed west across the Mediterranean to the island of Cyprus. It was the beginning of Paul's first missionary journey. You might wonder why they chose to go to Cyprus. Text doesn't state why they chose to go there. It doesn't tell us that the Holy Spirit directed them to go there, though He may have done that during the prayer meeting that they had. But it was a logical choice. Cyprus is located not far west of Antioch. Just south of the coast of Turkey was a meeting place of the east and the west of Greeks and Jews. The island was governed by the Romans, and so it had a Roman presence, and it had a number of synagogues where they could preach. It was also the seat of immoral worship, the worship of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, and so it was a needy place. That was reason to go to Cyprus.

But also it was the place from which Barnabas had come. He was a Cypriote, a Jewish man, but he was from Cyprus. He had family there. He had contacts there. He knew the island, and so it was their first stop. They arrived at Salamis, on the east side of the island. It was one of the chief towns of Cyprus, a commercially prosperous town with a large Jewish community. And as was Paul's custom, he and Barnabas first went to the synagogues and they proclaimed the word of God.

There were actually three of them. They had John with them, known as Mark. At the end of chapter 12, when Paul and Barnabas return from Jerusalem, Luke tells us that they brought with them John, who is also known as Mark. And Mark, we're told in the book of Colossians, was Barnabas' cousin, who apparently showed a genuine interest in the work of the ministry, and so they brought him with them.

Luke calls him their helper, which may mean that he took care of their physical needs or perhaps their travel arrangements, or he may

have had a part in the teaching work that they conducted. But the three of them traveled together and from Salamis they traveled west across Cyprus, preaching from synagogue to synagogue, until they came to Paphos, about 90 miles on the other side of the island. This was the Roman capital of the island. And it was there that God opened a door of ministry for them with the governor of the island, a man named Sergius Paulus. Luke calls him an intelligent man in verse 7. He was a thinker. And having heard of their preaching, he gave Barnabas and Saul an invitation to come and speak to him about the word of God.

When they did, they met opposition. It is the first recorded opposition that they meet, but it wouldn't be the last. In fact, we see in this paragraph, this section of the chapter, a pattern that will occur throughout the book of Acts. God opens doors of opportunity to preach the gospel and He opens hearts to receive it, but not without resistance. And in this case resistance came from a man named Bar-Jesus, which means "son of Jesus," or perhaps "son of salvation." But he didn't know Jesus and he had no knowledge of salvation.

Luke describes him as a Jewish magician and a false prophet. He gave himself the name Elymas, which means "sage" or "wise one." He was a sorcerer who claimed to have supernatural powers, probably through the use of charms and spells. The Mediterranean world, as all of the pagan world, was a very superstitious area. It has been described as a world in which they viewed the air as filled with demons and evil spirits the way the modern man views it as filled with viruses and bacteria. And so to ward off these evil spirits, these demons that could affect people's health and their destiny, they had all kinds of charms and spells, emulates that they wore. And they had people like Elymas who would perform magic and ward off the evil eye and the evil spirit. And evidently there were a lot of men like Elymas in the ancient world. Many of them were Jewish.

We find some in Ephesus in chapter 19, the seven sons of Sceva. They had knowledge of God's word, these Jewish magicians. They were able to use that to their advantage among the superstitious

Gentiles who had almost no knowledge at all of God, and turn their knowledge and their advantage to some financial gain.

Elymas, or Bar-Jesus, had a lot of influence over the governor, whose official title was proconsul, meaning that he was a representative of the Roman senate, which owned the island. And so Sergius Paulus was a man of considerable influence, a man of power and means who no doubt paid Elymas quite well. But the governor was an intelligent man, we're told. He wanted to learn more about the gospel that Barnabas and Saul were preaching, and so he called for them.

Well, Elymas was afraid that he might lose his influence and might lose his lucrative revenue. And so Luke tells us in verse 8 that he "was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith." It was a struggle between light and darkness, between truth and error, and a debate that went on for some time as Jewish man, Elymas knew the Scriptures, at least he knew them well enough to put up an argument against the gospel and he did to strenuously.

Victories are not won without struggle. That's the nature of Christian ministry and that's the nature of the Christian life. It involves struggle. Things do not come easily. If we think that as Christians we will mature to the point where we come to that plane in life where things sort of sail along and it become easy, it's not the case. It's not that way at all. In fact, Martin Luther made the point that the more mature a Christian becomes, the greater his or her struggles become. I think that's true.

Well, they come to the western end of the island and they have the opportunity to preach the gospel, and they preach the gospel; they give it, but they meet great resistance, great opposition from this man Elymas Bar-Jesus. And so with this man, Barnabas and Saul lock horns with the power of darkness and that engagement continued for some time until the Holy Spirit filled Saul, who in verse 9 is called Paul for the first time and will be called Paul throughout the rest of the book, and empowers him to boldly make a pronouncement of

judgment. We read that he fixed his eyes on him and said, "You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight way of the Lord?"

Paul was the true prophet here and he saw right into the heart of Bar-Jesus and exposed him for what he was. He was not a son of Jesus. He was a son of the devil. And he had great authority. He had great boldness to make this kind of statement, to direct it right to this man. He must have had some power, some charisma, and some authority, and yet speak so directly to him, not because Paul was a bold man in and of himself, because the Spirit of God gave him that boldness, and that's what He does. That's the power that we live in. That's the kind of power and authority that God gives to us when we act in obedience, when we go out in faith and we trust Him.

So he exposes this man for what he was. Then he says, "'Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time.' And immediately a mist and a darkness full upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand." Eventually it seems Elymas regained his sight, since Paul said he would be blind for a time. But what a fitting discipline for him. The spiritually blind who led others into spiritual darkness is made physically blind. He claimed to be a man of wisdom, a spiritual guide, and he was made to stumble about, seeking someone's hand to guide him.

Well, all of this had a significant effect on Sergius Paulus. Perhaps he saw the irony in it and saw the message that was given and the affliction that had been given to this false prophet. Verse 12 says, "He believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord." No doubt he was amazed at what happened to Elymas, but what Luke says amazed him was the teaching of the Lord.

For the first time, he heard about grace. He heard about atonement. He heard about the sacrifice of Christ for sinners and redemption and salvation that are in Him and are received through

faith alone. Now, it doesn't say that in the text. It doesn't give that the message of the word of God that he heard, but we know Paul and Barnabas spoke about that. It's what Paul always spoke about. He told the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 2:2, "I determine to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."

Now Sergius Paulus was an intelligent man. He had an inquiring mind. But Paul didn't come to him and speak to him about philosophy or issues of speculation. He spoke of the love of God in the cross of Christ. That's the focus of the Bible. That is the solution to sin. And that's what Paul and the apostles preached. And Sergius Paulus heard it and believed it. It was the first Gentile convert in a Gentile land.

And so dawn begins for the nations and Paul's calling as the apostle to the Gentiles had finally begun in earnest. It had been some times since the Damascus road when Jesus told him that He was sending him to the Gentiles. Now it has begun. Which brings me to three lessons on which we will conclude. They regard service, salvation, and the Savior.

First, Paul's service. His great work as a missionary and a man of letters began after much preparation, after many years in which he labored in obscurity. He spent time in Arabia, then in Asia Minor at Tarsus, and then finally time in Antioch. We know he spent about two years in Antioch, probably 10 to 12 years in all since the Damascus road experience. They were silent years. Don't know much about what took place, but they were necessary years. For Paul they were years of preparation.

Now if Paul needed 10, 12 years of preparation, do we need anything less than that? We are an impatient people. Or maybe I'm speaking for myself when I say that. I'm an impatient man, but I think that's probably characteristic of most of us. We want to be spiritual giants today.

But growth takes time. It happens slowly. It happens gradually. So we must be patient. We must understand that and not cut short the time of our preparation. Instead, we're to be faithful in what we have

to do now and not despise the day of small things and know that God will exalt you at the proper time. We see that in Paul. He's an example of that.

Secondly, we learn something of salvation. We see that in Sergius Paulus. He was a man of privilege. He was a man of social standing and power. But he was lost. Education, culture, wealth, position cannot save. They cannot give a man or a woman any advantage with God at all. Sergius Paulus had all of that, but he was utterly lost. He knew that his heritage was thoroughly pagan. It was the gospel of free grace that brought him salvation and it brought him salvation because it was sent to him by God Himself.

And that's the third lesson. We have a Savior who seeks and saves the lost. Men don't seek God. He seeks them. It was the Holy Spirit who sent out Paul and Barnabas. God always takes the initiative in salvation. That's grace.

Many years ago a Jewish scholar, Claude Montefiore, did a well-known study on Christianity. He wanted to know if there was anything really new in Jesus' teaching not found in any Jewish prophet or rabbi before Him. And so he did this study, and what he found, what he singled out that was distinctive, that was not found in any rabbi, was the picture of the divine Shepherd going out into the wilderness to seek a lost sheep. It's the picture of God, who not only receives those who turn to Him, but a picture of God as seeking and taking the initiative with those who have not turned to Him. That, he said, is one of the new excellencies of the gospel - a seeking God.

Jesus said, "I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also." Sergius Paulus was one. He sent his missionaries across the sea to get him, and as they went across the sea to claim him, a church in Antioch was praying for Saul and Barnabas, praying that their mission would go well, that they would have success, that they would be protected, that they would be made effective. And those prayers continued as those two men continued to go out and get the sheep of the other fold and bring them to the Lord Jesus Christ, to the

preaching of the gospel. And they were found throughout the Gentiles, among the nations, and this was the beginning of the spiritual dawn for the nations.

Well, it began for them so long ago, as it begun for you. Has the dawn of the gospel risen in your heart? Has the gospel penetrated your soul? Do you know Jesus Christ as your Savior? He is that. He is Lord and Savior. He is the Son of God who died in the place of sinners. His death was effective. His death accomplished its purpose. Because of His death, all who believe in Him will be saved. He has purchased a people for Himself and He invites all to come.

Have you come? Have you trusted in Him? If not, look to Jesus Christ. Turn to Him, trust in Him. The moment you do, you receive from Him the full free forgiveness of sins and life everlasting, eternal life that can never fade away or be taken away. May God help you to do that and help each of us to rejoice in the grace that we have received. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for Your goodness and grace. We see that set forth in this text, how You sent these men out, how You sent them preaching the gospel, and how it gained lost souls, and it goes. Your word never goes forth and returns to You void. It always has its perfect effect. We thank You for that. We thank You that by Your grace You saved us, we who have believed in Jesus Christ, and we pray that if there be any in attendance this morning who have not trusted in Him, Father, give them no rest or peace until they come to a saving knowledge of Your Son. We thank You for Him, for His death, for the life we have in Him, and it's in Christ name we pray. Amen.