

Experiences of Gospel Advance—Acts 13:6-13—10/18/26

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Open to Acts 13 in your copy of God's Word & let's read the section we began last week when purposeful missions began to the Gentiles.

Follow along with me as I read Acts 13:1-13. [READ]

As we follow this first missionary journey, the author Luke continues to highlight 2 expectations for Christians to be aware of.

On the one hand, Luke has described definite danger & difficulty of the darkness of evil.

And on the other hand, Luke has recounted the greater power of God & the continued advance of the Gospel.

Now those expectations arise in pagan territory in distant lands.

We begin to see what could be expected in the work of missions.

We begin to see the challenges that missionaries faced as they traveled preaching the Gospel & seeking to establish churches.

And we know those challenges can happen anywhere the Gospel is advancing to confront sin that is entrenched in lives & cultures.

Barnabas & Saul **were unique** in some foundational ways, but Christians have **always faced challenges** to Gospel advance.

And in those challenges, **God has always been proving His supremacy.**

Luke wrote of Christ building His church despite daunting obstacles in reaching beyond ethnic Jews & proselytes.

This was missions into nations dominated by darkness.

Did missionaries need new weapons for such spiritual warfare?

Could they be sure that Jesus' power would prove greater in such strange & uncertain contexts?

And what about now?—What might we expect in evangelism & missions as the darkness of evil is more obvious?

Do we need to learn new techniques for encountering unseen powers?

Is it naïve or foolish to expect the Gospel to exert power over the complex psychoses or occult oppressions of today?

Luke wrote to encourage readers that the power of Christ had proven to be greater with each new frontier.

So this early history established what was later explained in NT letters—namely, that the Gospel is enough to save any sinner.

Acts 13:6-13 shows what Gospel advance can experience & overcome because the **Word of God is greater** than the schemes of men.

As we walk through Acts 13:6-13, we'll outline **3 examples of what Gospel advance can experience & overcome** that can equip us for Gospel ministry no matter what we may face.

We'll see 3 experiences of Gospel advance that can be formidable & frightening challenges that can **also be confronted & conquered.**

The 1st of those is demonic opposition—**point #1—Gospel advance can experience & overcome demonic opposition.**

Recall that Barnabas & Saul had been set apart by the Holy Spirit to be sent out from Antioch & they went to the coast & sailed to Cyprus.

The Holy Spirit sent through the local church & Barnabas & Saul proclaimed Jesus as the Christ from the OT as they started in synagogues of the Jews in their travels across Cyprus.

Read verses 6-7 as we get back into that. [READ]

Going through or crossing over the whole island indicates that they stopped along the way in their travels.

Salamis was the main port on the east side of Cyprus & Paphos was the main port on the west side.

Since the proconsul sought to hear the word of God when they reached Paphos, they must have preached as they went.

Upon arrival, they were known for preaching of the Word of God.

That should always characterize us, shouldn't it?

For example, we know from **Romans 10:17** that "*Faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ.*"—Right?

That was their philosophy of ministry—as we said last week—that's the answer to the question of **what to do on mission**.

The **necessary & essential ministry method** that must be central & not sidelined is proclaiming God's Word so others can hear & believe.

But does that work?—is it enough for intense spiritual warfare?

Well, let's see—at Paphos, Barnabas & Saul met a **magician**—a man who claimed to have special powers & possibly secret knowledge.

He's later called a **son of the devil** in contrast to what his name meant—son of salvation—that's what Bar-Jesus meant.

He identified as being Jewish ethnically, but he was a false prophet.

Such false prophets among the Jews were **not new** as Israel's history had many despite God's warnings against the occult.

This was a pseudo-prophet who used occult practices like sorcery.

Maybe he was revered like Simon the magician of whom Acts 8:9-11 said he "*formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, '**This man is what is called the Great Power of God**.'*" And they were giving him attention because he had **for a long time astonished them** with his magic arts."

This magician Bar-Jesus must have been similarly impressive to be **hired** by the Roman provincial ruler on the island.

That was the **proconsul's** role & this proconsul named **Sergius Paulus** was known to be a **learner**, a thinker, a **man of good sense**.

Sergius Paulus must have seen the magician's power & secured him for his demonic power & insights.

So from this & other passages, we must know that demons are real—they are subject to God, but they **can manifest astonishing power**.

The NT repeatedly **warns of false signs & wonders**, especially in the final tribulation period.

And that may **sound scary**—you may shrink back or get skeptical or want to run & hide or **mock** when you hear of demonic opposition.

But it's **going on all the time** in the ideologies of the day like the acceptance & promotion of murdering babies in the womb.

That's **so atrociously violent & twisted** that it **must be demonic**.

As Jesus said in John 8:44, the devil was a murderer from the beginning & he is still inciting people to murder.

When we hear or read of mothers killing their own children or other murderous rampages, it's no surprise that they hear demonic voices.

That does not remove the guilt of the crimes of such people, but it does remind us that we are engaged in spiritual warfare.

Similarly, **John 10:10** says that thieving false shepherds come only to **steal, kill & destroy**; & those kinds of demonic evils are rampant.

Again, that is no surprise because *the devil is like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*, as **1st Peter 5:8** says.

And we know from **Ephesians 6:12** that “*our struggle is not against flesh & blood, but against the **rulers**, against the **powers**, against the **world forces of this darkness**, against the **spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places**.*”

Yet in that same section in Ephesians 6, what are our weapons?

Our weapons are **the Word of God & prayer** in practice—the **armor of God** has truth & righteousness & the Gospel & faith & salvation.

The protections & weapons are rooted in the Word as the sword of the Spirit & in intercessory prayer.

So the battle is intensely supernatural, but it is **also simple** as God has equipped us with all we need for life & godliness, as 2nd Peter 1:3 says.

That comes by knowing God & using His basic path of growth.

We must **not minimize** what He has given us by His Spirit, His Word, prayer, & the fellowship of the saints.

When Paul spoke of **strongholds** in **2nd Corinthians 10:3-5**, he said they were ideas raised up against the knowledge of Christ.

So the answer to the deep darkness & dangers of our times is the same as in the early church—it is **the Word of God & prayer**.

I think we naturally doubt those weapons because they seem **too simple** for the massive enslavements people have.

Or we’ve heard sensationalized stories or mystical methods that seem more edgy or magical or adventurous.

But the Gospel is enough & church history & my own life have plenty of stories of God’s power breaking through strongholds.

God is glorified as we keep pleading with Him & showing His love & sharing His truth & pointing people to His promises in Christ.

Don’t look for a secret formula—be faithful to pray & proclaim God’s Word & call people to repentance & faith in Jesus.

You can tell the story of humanity from the beginning that carries a **sustained longing for deliverance** until the Savior came in Jesus.

People are **hopeless & need truth** to explain the suffering they see & the guilt they feel & to offer the forgiveness they need.

They need to know that God had promised a Savior from the woman’s seed in His first words of judgment that came after the first sin.

You know that promise in **Genesis 3:15** that strengthened believers through OT history as God expanded that hope.

And you know that Jesus is that Savior, God the Son who became fully man to be the Perfect Mediator that no one else could be.

You know Jesus is that Promised Messiah & Christ who gave His life to pay the penalty for sin for all who trust Him.

And you know He rose in victory over sin & death to secure the future.

You know that precious Gospel that is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, as Romans 1:16 says.

Those clarifying truths & life-changing promises come from the Word of God & can completely change a person’s life.

Such teaching of Barnabas & Saul had intrigued Sergius Paulus & he summoned them & earnestly desired to hear God's Word.

So we see here more of how the advance of the Gospel across the island of Cyprus had met **opposition** in verse 8. [READ]

As with other Jews, Bar-Jesus had a Greek name that was Elymas that came from a related root for the word magician.

And literally, he **stood against them**—he was their *antithesis*, actively **resisting** Barnabas & Saul with a clear goal he was seeking.

He was *desiring & striving* to **turn** the proconsul **away from the faith**, where the faith here is the truth of the Gospel.

The overall message of Scripture that salvation is freely given to those who trust Jesus as the Lord & Christ is sometimes called **the faith**.

But **Elymas**, as this magician Bar-Jesus was called, was intent on **distorting, perverting & diverting away** the proconsul.

He was trying to mislead & cause uncertainty & departure from truth.

And that description leads to a 2nd way to understand the **danger** presented here by this demonic opposition.

Not only was this opposition demonic—it was also **deceitful**.

We noted 1st how Gospel advance can **experience** demonic opposition, note 2ndly how **Gospel advance can experience deceitful enemies**.

#2—Gospel advance can experience & overcome deceitful enemies.

Elymas was doing the devil's bidding like 2nd Corinthians 4:4 describes, blinding "the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ."

He wanted the proconsul trapped in **deceiving spirits & doctrines of demons** like 1st Timothy 4:1 describes.

Elymas had bitter jealousy & selfish ambition & arrogance & lying so he was earthly, natural, & demonic & created disorder & every evil thing as James 3:14-16 says.

Read Paul's assessment in verses 9-10. [READ]

Paul described Elymas in verse 10 as **full of deceit & fraud**—that was the content in him & that was what controlled him.

He was full of **cunning treachery & tricky, wicked villainy**.

And it was **all consuming**—ALL deceit & ALL fraud—because the truth was a threat to his position & power.

So this liar Elymas was obviously a **son of the devil** because the devil **"is a liar & the father of lies,"** as Jesus said in **John 8:44**.

It makes sense that Paul would add that Elymas was an **enemy** of not just some, but of **all righteousness**.

He was against **all that was right** in God's design for the people of Cyprus as he fought to retain his influence over the proconsul.

He was **twisting** the ways of the Lord that are **direct & right**.

Making crooked is the same word as **turning away** in **verse 8**, **distorting & deforming** what is **straightforward & clear & true**.

Such enemies of the Gospel do not want clarity & simple truth with contrasts of right & wrong, good & evil, light & darkness.

They want to **confuse & cloud & obscure & distract** so that people like this proconsul do not come to faith in Christ.

Paul rebuked him for **not ceasing**, not pausing, **not stopping** to do that kind of *twisting everything that is straight* as God said in Micah 3:9.

Think of it—truth is straight & plain, clear & wise from God.

So be **warned** of enemies of the Gospel that tried to mess it up & also be **ready** to **correct & confront such error**.

As I say that, we might look back at Paul's words in verse 10 & wonder **how he could be so direct & condemning**.

How could he **point the finger** at this magician & say '**you**' & **confront** his deceit & fraud & devilishness & unrighteousness & crookedness?

Perhaps you think Paul was **too hard on him** or think that **you could not be so direct** & clear in speaking against error & evil.

But we need to be clear **from verse 9 how Paul could do this**—how?—he was **filled with the Holy Spirit**, that's how.

Paul **fixed his gaze on him**, staring at him in direct address that began with an attention grabbing "OH!".

And Paul did so **after**, or **as a result of**, **being filled by the Holy Spirit**, meaning Paul was **controlled** by the Holy Spirit.

That's how Paul could be so bold & clear—the Holy Spirit helped him & empowered him.

Although the Spirit had come upon Saul earlier, this was the first time it was said that he was **filled** by the Holy Spirit.

He was filled like **Peter** was in **Acts 4:8** when he preached.

As in **Ephesians 5:18ff**, the **result** of being filled with the Spirit is speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, & spiritual songs.

The Spirit strengthens people to **know & speak** His Word.

And that is what **we need** in ministry to others—**even when** we are dealing with **demonic opposition & deceitful enemies**.

That was still the need when the ministry transitioned from mostly Jewish to mostly Gentile.

Last week we mentioned how the narrative shifted from Peter to Paul as the main character & now we see Saul called Paul in verse 9.

I do not find evidence that Saul changed his name because of Sergius Paulus the proconsul who trusted Christ here.

Rather, as with Bar-Jesus or Elymas the magician, most Jews had both a Jewish name & a Greek or Gentile name.

They used different names in different cultural contexts.

So Saul's Gentile name Paul is used in the rest of this book where the ministry is with **Gentiles rather than with Jews** as before this.

The shift from Jewish-focused to Gentile-focused ministry is evident in the shift from calling him Saul to calling him Paul.

So now let's see **what else Paul said** in verse 11. [READ]

After an attention-grabbing direct address to confront, Paul **grabbed attention again** for Elymas & everyone to **behold** this.

This judgment fit spiritual blindness, but it was mercifully **temporary**.

The Lord's hand depicts His **power** against Elymas in **judgment** like other descriptions throughout Scripture.

But God allowed a chance to repent & **did not permanently blind him**.

Elymas would not be seeing the sun for a season that began with the immediate fog & darkness that fell over him.

It was so obviously debilitating that, **as he was going around**, he was **groping** in pursuit of others **to lead him by the hand**.

Such instantaneous punishment must have been alarming, yet **what was even more amazing** was the **teaching of the Lord**.

Read **verse 12** to see that. [READ]

Having seen what took place, the proconsul then **believed** & Luke clarified **what was most amazing** to the proconsul.

He was **astounded at the teaching**, the **doctrine**, the **instruction**.

He was **overwhelmed** by the truth of the Lord he heard taught.

Though he had formerly been captured by the demonic deceit of this magician, the proconsul Sergius Paulus was **set free to trust Jesus**.

So **the word of God did not return empty or void**.

The teaching of the Lord did not fall on deaf ears—the Spirit gave life.

So we see how Gospel advance **can experience demonic opposition & deceitful enemies**—but **can also overcome** them.

Therefore, we **do not need to be afraid** of confrontation like this & we **do not need to shrink back** from bold declaration of truth & error.

By the Spirit's filling, we **can face such challenges prayerfully & trust God** to use His Word **supernaturally** to change lives.

The teaching of the Lord is what is truly amazing & transformational.

Do **you believe** that emphasis of this **narrative**?

Do **you trust** the emphasis of all Scripture on the power of the Gospel & the Word as **the sufficient & greater tool** in God's hands?

Do **you trust the Spirit** to strengthen you to speak, even when evil & error needs direct confrontation?

This narrative demonstrates the emphases Paul passed on in the pastoral epistles we call 1st & 2nd Timothy & Titus & other passages.

So we must beware that demonic opposition is **real & deceitful** enemies are **crafty**, but the **Gospel can overcome** them.

We can be encouraged by this narrative & be ready to pray & be bold & not back down from clearly telling the straight ways of the Lord.

We can dispel the clouds with faithful explanation of the Word & make humble appeals for people to repent & trust Christ.

You can do so—it may take practice to grow in it—but we need to **step up & shine the light of truth** in the midst of so much darkness.

And **we can do so** even when others around us **disappoint** us.

We can press on in the fight of faith even when others around us **quit or drop out or prove weak or let us down** in other ways.

So let's note that as a **3rd & final point** this morning that we glean from verse 13 in this chapter.

Gospel advance can experience & overcome **discouraging coworkers**.

Point #3 that we learn from John Mark's departure in Acts 13:13 is that **Gospel advance can both experience & overcome discouraging coworkers**.

It may **seem like** demonic opposition & deceitful enemies are **enough to battle against** to stay strengthened in spiritual warfare.

But we can be encouraged that **even the Apostle Paul** had to endure the hardship of coworkers that walked away from him.

Even the Apostle Paul had defectors & detractors.

Read verse 13 to see that amid more Gospel advance. [READ]

Notice how the narrative changes in this verse—the subjects are no longer Barnabas & Saul, but Paul & his companions.

We see a definite shift as they left Barnabas's home island & headed to the region Paul was from with Paul as new leader.

Barnabas's encouragement must have led to the Apostle Paul to step forward with those around him to set sail from Paphos to head north.

They arrived at the city of Perga in the southern coastal province of Asia Minor or modern Turkey called Pamphylia.

But then came the disappointing desertion by John Mark who had traveled from Jerusalem to Antioch & from Antioch on this mission.

John had come with them on this journey as a helper, but for reasons that Luke did not record, he returned to Jerusalem.

Yet we know this was not good because it came up in Acts 15:36-40.

Because of this, Paul & Barnabas had a disagreement about whether to take John Mark on their second missionary journey.

So John Mark was enough of a disappointment that Paul did trust him the next time & then he & Barnabas parted ways over it.

I'm sure that was sad for both Paul as the leader & for Barnabas as John Mark's cousin.

Yet we note that such a loss for the team did not stop the work.

That lack of a helper did not cause them to lose hope.

They pressed ahead in Gospel advance to overcome even a disappointment that hit close to their hearts.

We do not know why John Mark left—despite speculations, we must admit that Luke did not explain it.

We only know that they pressed ahead despite the disappointment & that it later became a cause for conflict on a future mission.

That's all Luke recorded.

But Paul wrote more that offers good news if we feel like WE have been like John Mark & have disappointed others in Gospel ministry.

In Colossians 4:10, Paul sent greetings from Mark who was with him & told them to welcome Mark if he came to them.

Then in his final dying letter, in 2nd Timothy 4:10, Paul asked to bring John Mark & added, "for he is useful to me for service."

That's an encouragement for all of us who know that we have been a discouragement to fellow Christians at certain times.

That's a glimmer of hope that we can repent & learn lessons & grow & be useful again even if we have deserted or dropped off the team.

God can restore & make our service desirable & useful again.

So let that motivate you to persevere in fruitful labors for the Gospel no matter how many times you may stumble & get up again.

Let that strengthen you for Gospel proclamation no matter how many times you realize you could have spoken more clearly or boldly or wisely or effectively.

Let that keep your gaze on Christ & His grace & power, not on measuring up to others to gain their approval or acceptance.

Remember that **we are accepted by God's grace** through the work of Jesus Christ alone & that informs how we serve Him.

We **do not serve to be loved**—we serve **because we are already loved**.

And we do so **together** as fellow pilgrims helping one another along on the journey where **we all stumble** at times.

We serve the Risen Savior, the Supreme King, & He will continue His forward march of building His church with Gospel power.

So we can **always trust Him even when others disappoint us**.

And listen—if you are young, you maybe haven't experienced that many heartaches from fellow Christians yet, but you likely will.

If you are one of those heartaches—if you feel the weight of your sin today & don't know what to do with it—then do not try to hide it or silence the truth pressing on your conscience.

Run to Jesus Christ the gracious Savior & surrender yourself to Him in faith & find forgiveness & freedom to walk in newness of life.

You only feel a measure of how guilty you are before God—we are all far worse than we realize.

But Jesus is also a far greater, more gracious Savior than we can estimate & we'll spend forever marveling at His love.

So turn from your sins & come to Christ today & let us know if we can help you after the service.

And let's all be aware of how to help others around us & how to respond to the variety of opposition, enemies, & coworkers around us.

None of us are perfect & so we will disappoint each other & we need to be gracious & patient with one another.

Some defections will be particularly painful & others will even prove how people were deceiving you & maybe deceiving themselves.

At times you may even wonder if what you face is demonic.

But we never need to despair or be surprised or feel outmatched.

We have the Spirit of God & the Word of God & we know the promises of our Lord & Savior that He will keep.

So yes, we must **know** that Gospel advance **can experience** discouraging coworkers, but we **must also know** that Gospel advance **can overcome** any number or manner of discouraging coworkers.

Gospel advance can experience & overcome demonic opposition, deceitful enemies, & discouraging coworkers.

What precious lessons for Gospel ministry locally & globally.

We will not lose—Christ will continue building His church.

So let's pray that He will keep us faithful in His work for His glory.

Pray with me as we close.