

Acts 13:4-12

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Preacher: Nathan Raynor

[0 : 00] Please take your copy of God's Word and turn to the book of Acts, chapter 13. Acts, chapter 13. It's good to be back with you today. If you were here with us last Sunday, you know that I had a bit of a stomach flu and was out.

Or maybe you didn't know I had a stomach flu, but I had a stomach flu and was out. And it's good to be with you, both not to be doing what I was doing last Sunday morning, and to be here to open God's Word and to consider its truth to us this morning.

Our text for today is Acts 13, verses 4 through 12. But there are a few things I think need to be noted from the beginning of Acts 13, and so we're going to look at and read together verses 1 through 12.

And we've come to a fairly pivotal place in the book of Acts, transitioning from the gospel being proclaimed primarily in Jerusalem, and it moving outward from this place.

The story is going, its main character being Peter is kind of setting, and its main character being Paul is rising. And it's where we find ourselves in a couple of chapters here, this action that's taking place.

[1 : 13] And at the beginning of chapter 13, into verse 4, we see Barnabas and Paul commissioned for the very first missionary journey.

And so we read, beginning in verse 1, 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.

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.

So being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there 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.

[2 : 33] But Elimas 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. Beloved, this is God's word to us.

It was written for his glory and for our good. We would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

Now before we get into the story itself, let's get to the stage just a little bit. And maybe you're not like me, but I'm a very visual learner, and so I like to understand where they are and where they're traveling from and where they're traveling to.

[3 : 51] So we'll see if we can pull this off and get a map up on the screen for you there. I did do that for my iPad, if you're wondering, which is pretty amazing. So they are currently in Antioch, right?

We see the church forming at the end of chapter 11 in Antioch. The gospel has gone forward because of a dispersion, because of the persecution that's arisen in Jerusalem. So the gospel has gone out. People have gone about gossiping the word of God. We see at the last part of chapter 11 that primarily the gospel is being preached to Jews. But here in chapter 11, we see that some disciples begin to preach the gospel to Gentiles, and this church in Antioch is formed. Now Antioch is about 300 miles north of Jerusalem. Now you can see it way over on the far right-hand side of the screen there. Yes, I'm doing that for my iPad. Isn't that fun? So they're in Antioch, the church in Antioch.

[4 : 51] You recall that Barnabas, needing some help, went and found Paul, brought Paul with him, and they remained in Antioch, and they're teaching in Antioch right at the end of chapter 11. So they travel from Antioch to Seleucia, about 16 miles, right? And go down from Antioch to Seleucia, to the coast about 16 miles, and they sail to Salamis on the island of Cyprus. Now Cyprus is where Barnabas is from. We find that out in Acts 4, verse 36. Barnabas' name is Joseph, but he's also called Barnabas the son of encouragement by the church.

And so Paul and Barnabas are commissioned to go back to Barnabas' hometown. They land on Salamis about 130 miles from Seleucia to Salamis, this journey in the Mediterranean. They land on Salamis, and they travel all over the island of Cyprus, what the text tells us. So they go all about the island of Cyprus. Exactly what that looks like, I don't know, but it's definitely not a straight arrow from Salamis to Paphos, right?

[5 : 59] They're traveling all about the island of Cyprus until they arrive at Paphos. Paphos is the capital of Cyprus, and there we see in our text that the gospel is preached to the proconsul, which would have been like the governor, the Roman appointed governor of the island of Cyprus.

So he's the ruler of Cyprus, and he's located in this coastal city of Paphos. Now Cyprus in this day was an incredibly corrupt place.

It was a vile place, and this is a common theme in the history of the world. Places that the gospel goes or places that need the gospel. It was the place in Paphos, the temple for the worship of Venus existed there.

The Roman Greek god of love was here. Lots of temple worship, prostitutes, a vile, vile place where they go for this very first time in their missionary journey to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now, there is so much that can be said of this morning's text. But I want to set our minds on just one thing this morning, which we'll consider with three supporting points.

[7 : 12] But just one primary thing that we need to consider in order to warm our hearts this morning. Note from Luke's account of Barnabas and Saul on the island of Cyprus, God's pursuit of his praise.

This is the thing. This is what I want to focus our attention on this morning from our text. God's pursuit of God's praise. Now, this runs thematically all throughout the Scripture.

In fact, we could spend weeks upon weeks showing you systematically that God is zealous for his own glory, for his own worship, for people to pay attention to him, to know him and know him for who he is and exalt him for who he is.

This is what it means for him to seek his praise. And for us as humans, I think very readily we can say, but isn't it wrong to be self-centered? And as humans, absolutely yes.

But you are not God. It is right and proper that God seeks his own praise. God is the most glorious, the most wonderful thing that we could possibly possess.

[8 : 23] And if God were to say, no, no, don't look at me. Pay attention to the creation around you. If he were to veil himself as the creator, it would be unloving toward us.

It would be ungracious toward us. We need to behold God. So he is zealous for his own praise. In 1 Peter 2, verse 9, Peter writes to those who are the elect exiles of the dispersion, going out of the gospel of Christ because of persecution, in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, verse 9, he writes, You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.

So you are a people set apart, right? For what purpose? Verse 9 tells us that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Because of the reality, the saving grace of the gospel of Jesus Christ, you have been set apart that you might proclaim the excellencies of him who saved you in this way.

It is the work of the church of Jesus Christ to make God known. One Old Testament reference in Ezekiel 36, verses 22 and 23.

[9 : 46] God tells Israel that the reason that he will deliver them from captivity, from their exile in Babylon and later Persia, is for the sake of the praise of his name.

Listen to the language very carefully what he says. God speaks to Israel through the prophet Ezekiel. Therefore, say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God, It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name.

So I'm going to bring you back from exile. I'm going to deliver you from captivity. But it's really not for your sake. It's for my sake. It's for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came.

And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.

Because of my goodness to you, my name will be made known. So God pursues His own praise. He is zealous for it.

[11 : 02] And we see that in our text, right? Well, the focus can often be simply about Paul and Barnabas and their helper, John Mark, we see in verse 5.

But Paul and Barnabas in verse 4 are sent out by whom? God. By the work of the Holy Spirit. In verse 9, we see Paul with this scathing indictment of Elimus the magician.

He's filled with whom? The Holy Spirit. Verse 11, he tells Elimus that the hand of the Lord is upon him.

Right? And God blinds Elimus. The point is that it's ultimately and it's finally God's pursuit.

It is His purpose in the world. It is His ministry that He would be known and worshipped. So as we set our minds on the glorious reality, that God is zealous for His praise, we'll do so with three points concerning God's pursuit.

[12 : 05] Number one, and I'll run back through these, but number one, the beneficiaries of God's pursuit of His praise. Number two, the means of God's pursuit of His praise.

And number three, the persistence of God's pursuit of His praise. So number one, the beneficiaries of God's pursuit of His praise.

Beloved, the gospel is not man-centered. It is altogether God-centered. But aren't we the great beneficiaries of that pursuit?

Isn't it wonderful that as God calls attention to Himself, He does so by the redemption of a people. And we are those people.

How wonderful that we get to be the wonderful side product of what God is doing to make His name known. So the beneficiaries, namely, the church.

[13 : 08] Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark as a helper are sent to carry the Word of God to whom? To the people of God.

They go to an island called Cyprus to call together God's people for the praise of His name. Can we know from this text that the Cyprus and that is the correct use, I looked it up, responded favorably to the proclamation of the gospel?

Can we know that the Cyprus responded favorably to the proclamation of the gospel? We know one did for sure from our text this morning, the proconsul. We know for a fact that he did. In fact, Sergius Paulus believed.

He was astonished at the teaching of the Lord. But can we know from the text? We can't. But there is a place that we can know from. So turn a couple pages over to Acts chapter 15.

We don't know the number, but we can know that there was a favorable response to the gospel because of this passage.

[14 : 20] Beginning in verse 36, Acts 15, verse 36. And after some days, Paul said to Barnabas, Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaim the word of the Lord and see how they are.

So there's the premise. We need to go on a journey. We need to go back and visit those who believed in the cities. Let's see how they're doing. Let's go back around and let's visit.

Now, Barnabas agrees. We don't see that in Luke's record, but he says, verse 37, Now Barnabas wanted to take with them, so he agrees, let's go, John called Mark.

Verse 38, But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. Now, just to give you some frame, we're going to talk about this in some coming weeks, but John Mark, after they left the island, he got scared and he turned around and he ran.

He went back to Jerusalem. So Paul and Barnabas get in a fight over this, right? Paul doesn't want to take John Mark, the coward, with him, and Barnabas, who's his cousin, still wants to take. He's ready to give him a second chance at this point.

[15:30] This is this division that happens. Acts 13, 13 records this. Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia, and John left them and returned to Jerusalem.

Right? Verse 39 of Acts 15, And there arose a sharp disagreement that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark, this is John Mark, Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to where?

to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord, and he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. Okay? So they go separate ways, but the very premise of what they're going to go do, right?

They've agreed together, we need to go back to the cities where we preach the gospel and people responded to the gospel, and let's see how they're doing. They go separate ways. Barnabas goes back to Cyprus.

Not home to lounge, but to check on the brothers to see how, in fact, they're doing. So people did respond favorably as they've traveled throughout the island to the grace of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[16:32] Right? And this is the wonderful reality of God's pursuit of his own praise, that there are beneficiaries of that pursuit, namely, the church.

So we can see the beneficiaries of God's pursuit of his praise in our text this morning. Secondly, let's look at the means of God's pursuit of his praise.

God is pursuing his praise. How does he do it? How does he do it? First, with his people. God pursues his praise with his people.

God uses his people to proclaim the gospel message to his people. Verse 4, So being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went, verse 5, and proclaimed the word of God.

Now, I think it's important, I think it's helpful to note the timeline here of the early church. The year that Barnabas and Saul slash Paul are sent to Cyprus is A.D. 47.

[17:41] And we can know that because of the death of Herod in chapter 12. This is a historical fact that we know. So it's A.D. 47. Now, exactly the time frame since the resurrection of Christ, we can't be completely sure of.

There's much debate out there about it. The range would be between 14 and 20 years. I think that's what you've got to wrap your mind around is that it's been some time since Acts chapter 1 to Acts chapter 13.

We didn't just speed through six months. It's been quite an expanse of time, the building of the church in this region and then beyond. Between 14 and 20 years, there's a lot of debate about when Jesus died.

It ranges from A.D. 27 to A.D. 33. Now, I'm going to argue for 14 years, but I'm not going to this morning. I'm going to suggest that Jesus was crucified in A.D. 33, but it doesn't really matter this morning or maybe at all.

the point being that a big bunch of time has gone by. The church in Antioch has existed for at least a year.

[18:51] There's been a period of time that they have been, Barnabas and Saul have been with them. Remember Barnabas and Saul in chapter 12 are sent back to Jerusalem and the picture in Luke's narrative jumps back to Jerusalem as well.

So they've been there and they've now returned back to Antioch. And notice what they're doing in the meantime. So not yet commissioned. Saul has been in Tarsus.

Barnabas goes and gets them. They go to the church in Antioch. They remain with them. They're teaching them. They take this trip to Jerusalem to deliver some financial support there. They're back in Antioch.

And what are they doing in verse 2? They're worshipping the Lord and they're fasting. They're gathered together as the church in fellowship together. They're about the work of Christian ministry where they are. And while they're doing this the Holy Spirit says they're together remember set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.

[19 : 57] So there is a calling. In this case it's an audible calling. The Spirit speaks to them. We don't know exactly how He does so. but Luke records it as audible speaking to them.

I want you to see that Paul and Barnabas did not have individual experiences. They didn't come off a hill and report to the church we feel called to missions.

The church is together and they confirm together that the Spirit of God commissioned Paul and Barnabas to go to the island of Cyprus. What do they do?

Verse 3 they continue fasting and they pray and they lay their hands on them and they send them off. They're sent out by the local church.

It grieves me today that there's so much personal experience in Christianity. There's so much feeling called to a particular thing without any examination.

[21 : 03] There are so many young people who want to do world missions who don't do mission at home. You're not reaching people here you will not reach people in China or India or wherever.

Because you know what? Stuff's harder over there. You have to do laundry by hand. It's not all romantic. You still have to go live your life and if you're not willing to pour it out for the sake of Christ where you are with your roommates and your co-workers and your classmates you won't do it. Abroad. It starts now on your bulletin. Before I read that I've heard a lot in churches that we all have a responsibility to mission.

You're either to go or you're to send. And I get the call. It's a foreign mission call. I get that. I get that. But I don't like the notion of labeling people missionary because it seems to suggest that everyone else is not.

I love this Spurgeon quote. Every Christian here is either a missionary or an imposter. God uses in the pursuit of His praise His people.

[22 : 21] And beloved, if we are zealous for the praise of God as He is, as we should be because of His work for us in Christ, we should want to go. It should be the driving passion of our lives to make Him known, to have other people experience the goodness of God in the personal work of Jesus Christ.

He uses His people. He'll use you if you'll avail yourself to that. He also uses His Word. What did Barnabas and Paul and John Mark do when they arrived on Cyprus?

They did not put on plays. They didn't come up with lots of clever analogy. They proclaimed the Word of God.

They preached God as good creator and sustainer of the universe. They preached sin, death, and eternal judgment. They preached the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

God's people are saved by hearing the Word of God. And I don't simply mean reading the text. Although I would strongly suggest that that's a great place to start.

[23 : 31] We can story the Word of God too. We can explain the Word of God to people. We can tell this big, big, big story. Some of you may have come to faith not by the actual text being read, but by somebody telling you the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Just simply sharing with you that story. Provided it is founded in the truth, it has saving power. So God's people are saved by hearing the Word of God and then by grace, through faith, in the personal work of Jesus Christ, they are snatched from the clutches of sin and death for the praise of His name.

Just in passing, tomorrow, 499 years ago, the Protestant Reformation began in a place called Wittenberg, Germany.

in order to recapture these truths for the church. They hadn't been lost, but they were largely forgotten.

I'd encourage you tomorrow not to celebrate Halloween, but instead to celebrate Reformation Day. All types of costumes abound from such a thing.

[24 : 46] Five Latin phrases emerged from the Reformation to summarize its basic theological principles, and these phrases are still useful to us. I don't use Latin to sound smart.

I really want you to know that. It's good to have phrasing in our mind that we wouldn't use normally, I think, to help us remember deep theological truths.

So I'm just going to rattle them off to you. You can look these up. The solas. Solas, Latin for alone, and you've got things that follow. So, sola scriptura.

The Word of God alone tells us that we are saved sola gratia by grace alone, sola fide through faith alone, solas Christus in the person and work of Christ alone, sola Deo Gloria to the glory of God alone.

The Wi-Fi password is hidden amongst those Latin phrases if you want to get on our Wi-Fi. Sola scriptura. Like the Word of God alone tells us that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in the personal work of Jesus Christ alone, to the glory of God alone.

[26 : 03] Glorious, glorious truths. Ephesians 2, 8 and 9, for by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not a result of works that no one may boast.

Faith comes from hearing and hearing from the Word of God. God births in us faith. There's nothing we can do to earn the favor of God, but praise the Lord in Christ He is pleased with us.

Last week's bulletin I would have used, I'm going to use it, George Whitfield once said, works, works, a man get to heaven by works, I would assume think of climbing to the moon on a rope of sand.

Now some in the proclamation of the gospel will respond favorably to it. Sadly, others will not.

Favorably in our text, the church referenced in Acts 15, right, that they're proclaiming to here in Acts 13, right, the proconsul, we see him respond favorably to the gospel.

Now there's a character in our text that responds unfavorably. He's called two names, the first, Bar-Jesus, and the second, Elimus.

[27 : 23] Now Bar-Jesus simply means son of Joshua. It's not that complex, in fact, Jesus was a really common name of the day, Yeshua, Joshua, right?

Verse 6 says that he was a Jewish, Jewish descent, false prophet. Just a few verses later, verse 8, he is called Elimus, which was his Roman name.

It seemed that many people had both in this case. This is the text where we see Saul, also called Paul. Some people have the notion that Saul was his pre-conversion name and Paul was his post-conversion name, as God throughout biblical history has renamed people at times.

Not the case here. Saul was his Jewish name, Paul was his Roman name. And here he finds himself on a largely Gentile island, primarily Gentile island, preaching the gospel, likely using, instead of his Jewish name, his Roman name, simply to become all things to all people, to relate more closely to them.

Interestingly, in our text, the pro-consul's name is what? Sergius Paulus. His name is Paul. And I just would imagine that Saul meets him and goes, hey, my name is Paul too.

[28 : 36] I have something I want to share with you. We have more in common than you know. So some will respond favorably, some will respond unfavorably.

And how do we make sense of this? There's much effort today to convince people that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. And I would definitely argue that we should plead the case of Christ to people, that we need to employ apologetics, that we want to argue for Christ.

But at the end of it all, it's going to be faith birthed in people that will bring them to saving faith in Jesus Christ. Now turn with me if you will to 2 Corinthians chapter 4. 2 Corinthians chapter 4 verses 1 through 6.

This text, Paul writing, helps us understand why their proclamation was received favorably by some, but not by Elimus. Why did the proconsul believe, but Elimus did not?

Verse 1, 2 Corinthians chapter 4. Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. He's talking about proclaiming the gospel.

[30 : 07] Some people will respond, some people will not. We do not lose heart. Why? 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. So you see what he's saying?

We don't lose heart because we have not been deceitful, we've not been cunning, we have not tampered 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. So if people don't understand it, if it's veiled, it's hidden from them, it's hidden from 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.

[31 : 11] 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, who created light, the light of the world, he said, let light shine out of darkness, has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

So they preach, they preach the good news, they proclaim the truth, and they understand that some will respond favorably and some will not.

But yet they keep preaching. A man one time asked Charles Spurgeon why, if some people were elect, he preached the gospel at all, and he said, if there were a yellow stripe on the elect's back, I would simply go around lifting up their shirt tails.

But since there are not, we preach the gospel. Verse 12, right, the proconsul believes.

The gospel, the glory of God, and the face of Jesus Christ is not hidden from him. It says, when he saw what had occurred, so he sees this thing happen to Elymas, right, does he believe because of what he saw happen to Elymas?

[32 : 36] I'd suggest not, for he was astonished not at what happened to Elymas at the teaching of the Lord, at the word of God proclaimed.

So, God employs means for the pursuit of his praise. His people, his word, and from our text today, there are some other means, but from our text today, thirdly, his suffering.

As God pursues his praise, he does so with his suffering. The proclamation of Jesus Christ and the suffering of Jesus Christ, they walk hand in hand.

They walk hand in hand. If you propagate the word of God, if you proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, you will be persecuted.

And we often have these really big notions of persecution that are a reality. We see a lot of it in the book of Acts. We see a lot of it in the world today. In fact, next Sunday is the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church.

[33 : 43] And we're going to take some time to do that and consider that together. But I fear sometimes we think of that as such a far-off thing. Really, the type of persecution we're talking about next Sunday is beatings and imprisonment and martyrdom.

We need to join in prayer for churches that are experiencing that around the world. Undoubtedly, we shouldn't think that we're too much like them. However, we also shouldn't think that we're too different from them.

Those who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. If you're not feeling any pushback from the world, you're not proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ as you should.

The two walk hand in hand. They are mutually inclusive. They're mutually inclusive. We're not saved from persecution because we're Americans.

Christians. But Elimus the magician, verse 8, for that's the meaning of his name. Elimus means Greek, wise, or magical.

[34 : 50] Opposed them. The Greek word for opposed is a little stronger than we may think. He resisted or he was hostile toward this message. And what did he seek to do?

He sought to turn the proconsul away from the faith. This is a picture of persecution the way we may experience it today. Simple opposition to the message of Jesus Christ.

Seeking to intervene and turn people away from the way of faith. Listen to what Paul wrote in Colossians chapter 1 verse 24. Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake.

And in my flesh, peculiar phrasing here, I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is the church.

I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is the church. Is Paul suggesting that Christ's suffering wasn't enough?

[35 : 58] May it never be. Paul is not saying that Christ's suffering was lacking in its power. What he is saying is that Christ's suffering needs to be displayed to those who will believe in him.

Life, death, and resurrection is given power as we proclaim the truth of the gospel as we suffer for their sake. Proclamation and persecution are mutually inclusive.

inclusive. People around us need to see us encounter resistance to the glorious truth of the gospel and press through it all the same. They need to hear us continue to preach the word of God when people don't like us for doing so.

When people think us strange, when we lose a job because of the proclamation of the gospel, people need to see us press on through that. The two things are mutually inclusive.

So we see the beneficiaries of God's pursuit of his praise, the church, the means of God's pursuit of his praise, his people, his word, and his suffering. And finally, we see the persistence of God's pursuit of his praise.

[37 : 15] Praise God that he is persistent in his pursuit of his praise. God intended to save the proconsul and nothing would stand in his way.

I hope that's a great encouragement to you this morning. God had an intention for the governor of Cyprus and nothing would stand in his way. He created a church in Antioch, he commissioned missionaries to Cyprus, and he brought them to the proconsul, Sergius Paulus.

And in the face of the opposition of Elimus, catch this, that in verse 9, Saul, who's also called Paul, is filled with the Holy Spirit. I would not suggest that anytime somebody opposes your proclamation of the gospel, that you call them a son of the devil.

I would advise caution in speaking the way that Paul speaks here, but Paul certainly doesn't seem to be frightened at all by this man, does he? He's filled with the Holy Spirit, moved by the Spirit to say to him, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?

What is meant by that, making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? And we get a little bit of a hint if you look in verse 8, Luke records that Elimus was seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.

[38 : 53] And the Greek word for making crooked and the Greek word for seeking to turn, it's a single word and it's the same word. So these two correspond, right?

Seeking to turn and making crooked correspond, which leads me to believe that also the faith and the straight paths of the Lord correspond.

So God has straight paths leading to faith. And He will not allow them to be made crooked. He will not allow one of His own to be turned from His praise.

Praise Him for that. After Peter proclaims that Jesus is the Christ in Matthew 16, 18, Jesus says, and I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, He's talking about the proclamation that Jesus is the Christ, not on Peter.

He's talking about the proclamation on this rock that you have said, I am the Christ, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

[39 : 59] They will not stand in opposition to the advance of the church. So we can see God's pursuit of His praise as we observe the beneficiaries of God's pursuit of His praise, the means of God's pursuit of His praise.

I'm saying that a lot and the persistence of God's pursuit of His praise. So what does it mean for us today? We're looking at it here, life of the early church, 8047.

Does it mean something for us today? It certainly does. It's God's word to us. What's the application? I've got three and they're quick. number one, if you have placed believing faith in Jesus Christ, then you are a beneficiary of God's pursuit of His praise.

You should revel in the fact that this is what God is set to. A quick unanimous poem for you, which I think pictures this so well.

Oh, how long and dark the stairs I trod, with stumbling feet to find my God, gaining a foothold bit by bit, then slipping back and losing it.

[41 : 17] There came a certain time when I loosened my hold and fell thereby, down to the lowest step my fall, as if I had not climbed at all.

And as I lay despairing there, there came a footfall on the stairs, and lo, when hope had ceased to be, my God came down the stairs to me.

We are the beneficiaries of God's pursuit of His own praise. If you have not placed believing faith in Christ, then the invitation is before you today.

I pray that you find yourself humble, laying with no hope, at the foot of those stairs. The invitation of God coming to you that you might respond in faith is for you today.

Will you recognize your rebellion against a good and glorious God? Will you recognize that you are like a cyprine? Repent of your sin and place your faith in the personal work of Christ this day. [42 : 25] I want you to be a beneficiary of God's pursuit of His praise. I want you to praise Him with me forever. Secondly, if you are a Christian, God intends to use you as a means in the pursuit of His praise.

Are you obedient to the call of God on your life here now? And will you continue to be obedient in all things to all peoples?

this is your gospel commission. The disciple of Jesus Christ makes disciples of Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, we can all rejoice in God's persistence in the pursuit of His praise.

We are a part of a story that began a long time ago. Began in Genesis chapter 1. It kicked off in Genesis chapter 3.

We are part of this huge redemptive story. Barnabas, Paul, and John Mark on the island of Cyprus is just one scene in a much larger play.

[43 : 42] God is pursuing and He has made us His own. Further, we can be emboldened in our gospel proclamation because nothing will stop the salvation of God's people.

Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Let's pray together.