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PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
NUMBER 48
ACTS 13:4-13

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ACTS 13:4-13 "So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister. And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus: Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord. Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem."

The first thing we encounter on this missionary journey was opposition. In this instance the visible opposition came from demon power.

Some Principles On Demon Possession

From Psalm 109:6-13 we learn of some of the things the Devil can do.

1. The Devil can blind people with religion.
PSALM 109:7 "When he shall be judged, let him be condemned: and let his prayer become sin."
2 CORINTHIANS 4:3-4 "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."
2. The Devil has the power on certain occasions, under the permission of God, to shorten people's lives.
PSALM 109:8 "Let his days be few; and let another take his office."
3. The Devil can sometimes remove people from places of authority. God sometimes permits the Devil to do this.
4. Under certain conditions the Devil has the power of death.
PSALM 109:9 "Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow."
5. The Devil can persecute little children.
PSALM 109:10 "Let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg: let them seek their bread also out of their desolate places."
6. Under certain conditions the Devil has the power to cause people to lose their health.
7. Satan can turn people against other people.
PSALM 109:12 "Let there be none to extend mercy unto him: neither let there be any to favour his fatherless children."
8. He can cut off man's posterity down through one generation.
PSALM 109:13 "Let his posterity be cut off; and in the generation following let their name be blotted out."

In a number of instances in the Bible, Satan is presented as a killer. He motivated Cain to kill Abel. 1 John 3:12. He took the lives of Job's children. In 1 Cor. 5:5 Satan administered death. He is presented as a source of disease in 2 Cor. 12:7.

In Job 2:6-8 he produced illness in Job but was commanded not to kill him. In Acts 10:38, Luke 13:16, and Matthew 12:22 Satan is shown to produce certain kinds of illness. Sometimes the disease Satan causes is mental and sometimes physical.

LUKE 22:31-32 "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Here we see the Devil wanted to get into the act and pull Simon Peter apart and ruin his life, but Jesus said, "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not".

1 TIMOTHY 1:19-20 "Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme." Here we see how people were turned over to Satan for punishment.

2 CORINTHIANS 2:10-11 "To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices." This is the story of how Satan tried to get people to put their influence on his side.

In China and Africa many of our missionaries have witnessed demon possession and demon influence. Now no believer can be demon possessed for the Holy Spirit is in every believer and a demon cannot dwell in the same place as the Holy Spirit.

In Mark 5 there is a story of a poor demon possessed man who would run around naked, and would cut himself with rocks, and when chained would break the chains. He said that his name was "Legion" for "we are many". But at Jesus' command he fell at his feet and the demons departed.

ACTS 13:4 "So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus." There were three members of this missionary party. The "They" means Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark.

Please notice "They were sent forth by the Holy Spirit". This is the only power that should ever motivate a missionary to go and serve.

They went down thirteen miles to Seleucia, the port on the Mediterranean, and sailed to Cyprus. This Island is 140 miles long and 60 miles wide at its widest point. It was a very important island in the Roman world, the source of their copper.

ACTS 13:5 "And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister." At Salamis they preached the Word of God. This word "preach" is "kata angello". It means to "Make an announcement according to an absolute norm". You see, the thing that astounded this great Roman ruler was the gospel Paul preached. They didn't get up and as we say, "hoot and holler", but he preached the fundamental things of the gospel. The language says they kept on communicating dogmatically. You see, there is just one way of salvation and someone needed to lay it on the line. Paul did just that. There are not five different ways of salvation, just one way. Please notice, they went to the Jews first, to their synagogue. They stuck with the gospel. They didn't go in and try to change society, or to talk to them about their customs or about their social needs. They preached the saving gospel.

Notice that they had a business manager, someone to do the dirty work. His name was John Mark. Later he would write the Gospel of Mark. He was the son of Mary in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12). Barnabas was his uncle. He was converted under the influence of Simon Peter (1 Peter 5:13).

He will desert Paul and Barnabas when they get to Pamphylia and go back home. Later Barnabas will want to forgive him and take him with them again, but Paul will not agree to it. Barnabas and Paul will have a bitter argument over John Mark and this caused Barnabas and Paul to split up and go different ways. Let it be said in advance that Barnabas was right and Paul was wrong. Barnabas stuck with John Mark and this was a big factor in his usefulness later on, including the authorship of the Gospel of Mark. Three times Paul will later say that he made a mistake about John Mark--in Philemon 24, Col. 4:10, and 2 Timothy 4:11.

ACTS 13:6-8 "And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus: Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith." And here is the opposition.

Paphos was a city founded by the Pheonicians. Here they found a sorcerer, a Jew, whose name was Son of Joshua. This sorcerer had a great influence on the Roman ruler of this island. Many rulers in the ancient world sought help from sorcerers and astrologers.

The ruler of this island is called here a deputy but a more accurate name is a Proconsul. His name was Sergius Paulus. There were at this time seventeen provinces in the Roman Empire, and this island of Cyprus was one of the most important ones. So Sergius Paulus was of great influence in the Roman Empire. Prudent means a man of intellect. He was an aristocrat. He called for Paul and Barnabas to come and preach to him.

The word "Desired" shows to us the attitude Sergius Paulus had. He had positive volition toward God, and because of this God is going to see to it that he hears the gospel. When a man is anxious and willing to hear the gospel, God sees to it that he hears. (This point is taught all the way from Jeremiah to John 17:17 and also in Acts 17.) So we are not surprised when Sergius Paulus becomes a believer.

Elymas is the Arab name of this sorcerer and means "wise man", his Jewish name was Bar Jesus. "Withstood them" means he heckled them, would break in every time Paul started to make a good point. In other words, he tried to smother out the effectiveness of Paul's message. He was Satan's man in this Roman court.

ACTS 13:9 "Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him" Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, is going to pronounce a curse on him and blind him. "Set his eyes on him" means that Paul stared at him. This is the first time Saul is called Paul.

ACTS 13:10 "And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" Please notice that Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit, yet he said some very sharp things. He called him a child of the Devil. Paul said, "You will cease to pervert the ways of the Lord now!" There is no question here.

ACTS 13:11 "And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand." When Paul said, "The hand of the Lord is upon you and you will be blind", immediately blindness fell on him. There is a soul here for whom Christ died about to be saved, and he is not going to let this servant of the Devil stop this conversion. And Sergius Paulus began to cry out, "Someone help me, someone help me".

ACTS 13:12 "Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord." Please notice what impressed the proconsul. Not the miracle, but the Word of God. It was the amazing truth of the Gospel message that astounded the proconsul. The Word of God is power, and nothing else.

You cannot be saved by human good. No doubt this proconsul had done much human good, but only divine good satisfies God.

It says of the proconsul "He believed". In the moment he believed with his own volition, the reality of salvation came to him.

As we close this meditation on the salvation of this Roman proconsul of the long ago please notice this--

THE POWER OF SALVATION WAS NOT IN THE MIRACLE BUT IN THE MESSAGE.

The most powerful thing in all the world is the Word of God. This is why later on Paul would write, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ". This was the beginning of a revival in the Island of Cyprus.

In the next verse we see that John Mark deserted them and went back home. But that is another study.