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Acts 13:1-12

Let's go back to childhood and the playground. When they were choosing teams for a sport was it a boost to your self-esteem or a dose of discouragement? Remember the feeling if you were last to be chosen? Let's remember a more positive feeling. At some point in childhood, you were introduced to some activity and discovered you were really good at it. This new talent or skill brought you joy, and you were encouraged to use it. Remember that feeling?

Let's take a poll, who agrees with the statement: *"Everyone is good at something?"* How does that apply to serving within the church as a follower of Christ?

1 Corinthians 12:7 (NLT) — tells us, *"7 A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other."* Then for several verses Paul listed broad categories like, teaching, leadership, evangelism, discernment, hospitality, mercy, giving, helps.

As Jeremy said in his Reset podcast last Thursday: *"Everyone can serve others."*

Frederick Buechner wrote: *"Your vocation in life is where your greatest joy meets the world's greatest need."* To paraphrase: *"When a follower of Christ uses our God-given gifts and talents to serve others, people are blessed, God is glorified, and we feel joy."*

There are two points in today's text: 1) The key words in this text are "set apart." These verses describe the missionary model that still exists today: Local congregations, led by God's Spirit, sending out those whom He has "set apart" as missionaries to spread the gospel. 2) The application for every Christ-follower: Each of us has been "set apart" for God's purposes using the unique gifts He has given us to serve others, to support His work, to share the gospel, and to glorify Him.

In verse one of Acts 13 the author Luke takes us to the important church at Antioch.

Acts 13:1–12 (ESV) — **1** Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. **2** 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." **3** Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

- When the persecution of Christians caused them to flee Jerusalem many went to Antioch (of Syria) and soon the first Gentile Christian church was formed.
- Acts 11:26 tells us Christ-followers were first called "Christians" in Antioch.

- The church at Antioch played a pivotal role in the spread of the gospel. In these verses we see it was the first church to send missionaries to other cities.ⁱⁱ
- The church was led by three gentiles and two Jews.
- Simeon's surname "Niger" in Latin meant "dark or black." Manaen was a childhood "foster brother" of Herod. The same Herod who opposed Christ.
- What does that tell us about the demographic make-up of this church?
- Verse two: What practical steps were these church leaders taking to discern how they were to fulfill Jesus' command to spread the gospel (Acts 1:8)?
- "*The Holy Spirit said...*" Again, the work of the Holy Spirit is central in Acts.
- How are these verses a lesson for every Christ-follower and every church?
- "Set apart" in this verse means to "**appoint**, set aside for a particular function."
- Verse 3: After more prayer and fasting, Saul and Barnabas were commissioned and sent on their way on the first missionary journey of the new church.
- The missionary model: the Spirit appoints, and the church sends and supports.

4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. **5** When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them.

- They began preaching first in the synagogues to the Jews then to the Gentiles.
- Their "intern" or "assistant" was John Mark. According to church tradition, [he] was the author of the Gospel of Mark.ⁱⁱⁱ He may have been Barnabas' cousin.
- When they arrived in Paphos they encountered both opportunity and opposition.

6 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. **7** He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.

- Verse 7: Sergius Paulus was the Roman governor in Cyprus. What else does verse seven tell us about him? The gospel was for everyone but practically speaking why would he have been a great "prospect" for the message?
- The problem: A sorcerer named "Bar-Jesus (AKA: Elymas) who worked for the proconsul. It was not uncommon for officials to have their own private "magicians" as advisors.
- The name "Bar-Jesus" meant Son of Jesus or Joshua.^{iv} That will be ironic shortly.

8 But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.

- Why would this sorcerer likely want to distract his boss from the gospel?
- How do we see similar opposition to Christianity today based on someone's personal agenda?

9 But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him **10** 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? **11** 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.

- Paul’s play on words: Bar-Jesus wasn’t a “son of Jesus” but a “son of the devil.”
- What does that tell us about the ultimate source of opposition to Christ?
- Paul was “filled with the spirit.” What is the lesson for us when we need to respond to someone that is opposing the things of Christ and the gospel? Practically speaking how can we prepare for opposition to our faith?
- **Luke 12:11–12 (ESV)** — Jesus told us, **11** And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, **12** for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”
- Paul was very direct and very bold in his response saying things like “son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy.”
- **1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)** — Tells us, **15** but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,
- How can we reconcile Paul’s bold, “both barrels” response with that verse?
- How might the context with the sorcerer have called for more force and less gentleness? How can we know when to be like Paul or like that verse in 1 Peter?
- Why was God’s temporary punishment of the sorcerer ironic for Paul?
- Opposition to Christ should not be surprising.
- In **1 Corinthians 16:9 (ESV)** Paul said, **9** for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.
- In **Matthew 5:11–12 (ESV)** — Jesus said, **11** “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. **12** Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
- Why might opposition to the gospel be a sign the gospel is working?
- Charles Spurgeon said opposition to the gospel was like the wind needed to fly a kite. The kite flies AGAINST the wind. No wind and the kite won’t fly.
- Paraphrasing Spurgeon: Opposition to the things of Christ can “*paradoxically lead to growth and understanding.*” We might not win over the person aggressively opposing our faith, but the dialog might cause interest in others.
- Further paraphrasing Spurgeon: “*Even the most determined efforts to hinder progress can backfire, ultimately serving a greater purpose. Despite centuries of attempts, those who oppose the gospel message continue to underestimate its resilience and adaptability.*”
- This false teaching sorcerer’s opposition did indeed backfire.

12 Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

- Was Sergius Paulus's salvation real? Only God knows. The point is when he heard the gospel and witnessed the power of God, he believed in Christ.
- Let's summarize what we've learned about this first missionary launch.
- We said the key words in this text are "set apart."
- These verses give us the missionary model that still exists today: Local congregations, led by God's Spirit, sending out those He has "set apart" as missionaries to spread the gospel.
- The Spirit appoints, the church sends and supports.
- Evangelism and missionary work should begin with seeking the Spirit's leading. In reality, EVERYTHING a Christ-follower does should be Spirit-led.
- We should expect opposition to the things of Christ and the message of the gospel and see it as an indication that God's Spirit is working.
- We should prepare to respond to opposition to Christ firmly yet appropriately by knowing the truth of scripture and asking the Holy Spirit to guide our response.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- Someone might say, "I don't feel called to be a missionary. How does this apply to me personally?" Back to those words "set apart."
- Every Christ-follower has been "set apart" for several roles.
- We are set apart to SERVE, SHARE, SUPPORT and to be SPIRIT-LED.
- We are set apart to SERVE God's purposes with the unique gifts He's given us.
- We are set apart to SHARE. Sharing with those in need and sharing the gospel.
- We are set apart to SUPPORT our local church and mission efforts with our money, time, and talents.
- Finally, and most importantly, we've been set apart to be SPIRIT-LED.
- That means striving to become more like Christ in obedience to His commands in scripture. Jesus taught us to be different not odd. Our lives should be different from the unsaved in a winsome way that draws people to Christ. That difference in our behavior only comes by studying God's word and following His Spirit.
- One last point: We are set apart to SERVE, SHARE, SUPPORT and to be SPIRIT-LED, NOT to SIT and SOAK. Every follower of Christ has a role to play, and we are to be SPIRIT-LED SERVANTS not SIDELINE SPECTATORS.

ⁱ <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/140448-the-place-god-calls-you-to-is-the-place-where>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Antioch-in-the-Bible.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ Seal, D. (2016). [John Mark](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

^{iv} Vincent, M. R. (1887). [Word studies in the New Testament](#) (Vol. 1, p. 515). Charles Scribner's Sons.

^y<https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/two-pauls-and-a-blinded-sorcerer/#flipbook/> (paraphrased) <https://www.perplexity.ai/search/paraphrase-and-shorten-a-contr-x7BSJlfQRyaAadp58icuhg>