

## Scripture Reading:

Act 13:4 “So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. 5 And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as their assistant. 6 Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, 7 who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. 8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. 9 Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him 10 and said, “O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? 11 And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time.” And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. 12 Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.”

# "Binding the Strong Man"

This morning we begin to consider the great missionary journey that Paul and Barnabas were sent on by the Holy Spirit from the Church in Antioch. I have included a map in the order of worship so that we can all relate to some of the places that will be mentioned...

- Our young children will love having something they can draw on!

And as we instruct them about the geography of our world those of us who are older will notice that these journeys are mostly confined to the northern and eastern portions of the Mediterranean Sea. Just as the skeptics argue that the Old Testament is just a book written by a small savage nation trying to make itself important, so they can now argue that the Book of Acts cannot be about taking the Gospel to the world when in fact it did not get very far! We must remember two very important facts:

First, as Daniel saw in his interpretation of the King's dream, the four great Kingdoms of the earth were all in or near this region: They had played their appointed role as protectorate of God's people, which we will continue to see in the Book of Acts

- But now they are to be conquered by the Gospel.
- The promises made to Abraham are for all the nations!

As we discussed last week, Luke finishes his orderly account with the Apostle Paul sitting in the world seat of power at the time: Rome! Preaching the Gospel to all who would listen.

- That is the BIG picture in Acts!

The lessons we will learn along the way with these missionary journeys and finally with the imprisonment of Paul are there to show us how the Spirit carries on this work today as He continues to fill the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus!

So we see Barnabas and Paul moving over to the seaport city of Seleucia where they sail to the Island of Cyprus. On a clear day Cyprus can be seen from Seleucia and it was the home of Barnabas, reminding us that God often moves us where He wants us to go with very familiar means... Did the Spirit give written instructions to Paul & Barnabas about the route they were to take for this important journey or did He audibly tell them to go this way or that? Or did the Spirit know that in choosing Barnabas they would naturally begin the journey via Cyprus! As I often tell young people who are searching for their vocation...

- God will most likely have you doing something you enjoy doing or working in an area where you are quite talented.

In verse five we are given two important bits of information: They preached to the Jews first and John Mark came along as their assistant. Approaching the Jews first was both natural for Paul & Barnabas and continues the pattern that Jesus established with His command to be witnesses in Jerusalem, all of Judea and Samaria and then to all the world. Luke gives us no other details about the visit to Salamis, but we will see what was preached in the Synagogue as we move on to Pisidia next week.

I found it interesting that Luke, writing under the inspiration of the Spirit, gives us some details about the trip and the geography, but he begins with a story about a demonic man, who Paul calls a son of the devil, and the Roman ruler of Cyprus.

- Both of these men should remind us of some Biblical patterns that we often see: God fearing civil leaders and strong demonic resistance.

Think back with me to the beginning of the earthly ministry of Jesus... John the Baptist proclaims that Jesus is the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world. Jesus is baptized by John and approved by the Father and then the Spirit immediately takes Him into the wilderness where Jesus is tempted by the devil. After putting Satan in his place, Jesus begins His public ministry and what does He immediately confront right in the Synagogues? Demons... LOTS of Demons!

- So it should not surprise us to see demonic opposition right up front in this first great journey!

Jesus had no problems dealing with these demons and neither does Paul, but it is important that we understand why this is the case or we will get ourselves into some real trouble. When Jesus put the demons in their place the people marveled, but the false shepherds of Israel had a different theory as we learned earlier in our study of Luke's Gospel...

Luke 11:14 "And [Jesus] was casting out a demon, and it was mute. So it was, when the demon had gone out, that the mute spoke; and the multitudes marveled. 15 But some of [the religious leaders] said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons. 16 Others, testing Him, sought from Him a sign from heaven. 17 But He, knowing their thoughts, said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls. 18 If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? Because you say I cast out demons by Beelzebub. 19 And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges." *[as James points out these demons were more afraid of the True and Holy God than these proud religious leaders were!]*

20 "But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. 21 When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. 22 But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils."

- Now I don't think we have many today who would argue that Jesus is working for Satan, at least not in our churches.
- However, if we ask the question, 'has Jesus bound Satan' there might be a little more debate.

When I was a young Christian I would often hear that Satan is the 'god of this world' or that he is 'the Prince of the Power of the air.' Ironically, the first concept comes from the accounts of the temptation of Jesus by the devil: At one point Satan shows Jesus the Kingdoms of the world and says they are his to give... I am reading through the Book of Job in my morning readings right now and one lesson that comes through loud and clear is that even though Satan can exercise great power, like killing Job's children, destroying all his goods and even causing him great physical pain, Satan could not touch Job, or anything else, without God's permission.

- When Satan showed Jesus all the kingdoms of this earth, were they under his sway? Absolutely
- Were they his to give? Absolutely not!

Who owns the nations according to the Psalm we are often commissioned with? God does! In Psalm 2 we read and sing often, “Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth your possession.” So, unless Jesus is now sitting at the Father’s right hand saying that He does not want the nations as His possession, then we know that that is exactly what is going on today.

- Jesus HAS bound the strong man and He is plundering his possessions!

The reason that Luke begins with this confrontation is so that we can see how this great truth is worked out in history

- It is given so we can know that the binding of Satan is not some future event after he has had his way with the world and the church!

Listen to what the risen and glorified Jesus said to the Apostle John when He appeared to him on the island of Patmos: “Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.”

It is also revealed to John why those keys are important when we get to chapter 20:

“Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. 2 He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; 3 and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished.”

While we can debate whether some of the angels in Revelation are in fact Jesus, this one has to be a reference to Jesus because Jesus told John that HE had those keys. Here we see Satan bound and bound for a very specific reason: “so that he should deceive the nations no more.”

- Could we have a better picture of how this is worked out in space and time than the account that we have before us this morning?

Paul and Barnabas journey across the island to Paphos, where they meet the roman ruler Sergio Paulus who sought to hear the word of God. The Spirit of God is doing a work in this man’s heart, but we see clearly how Satan has deceived the nations. Luke tells us they found this leader being greatly influenced, or more rightly deceived, by a Jewish man named Bar Jesus, which means son of Jesus or son of Joshua [*how is that for being a wolf in sheep’s clothing!*]

Luke calls this man a sorcerer & a false prophet, who was ‘seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.’ Luke will now refer to Saul of Tarsus as Paul for the first time: This was his Roman name and now that he has begun his mission as the Apostle to the Gentiles it will be the name by which Luke refers to him from now on in the Book of Acts.

- Paul understands his mission and Paul know it would succeed because Jesus HAD bound the strong man!

And so we see him confront this false prophet directly and forcefully: 9 “Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him 10 and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?"

- Again we see that it is the Holy Spirit who directs the advance of the Kingdom:
- Paul is not confronting this man out of anger or to show off:  
He confronted this man because he was filled with the Holy Spirit!

Paul then pronounces God’s judgment on this man:

11 “And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time.” And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand.”

Paul says he will be blind for a time and we do not know how this man reacted to the Lord's discipline: He may have hardened his heart like Pharaoh did in times past or he may have had his sight restored in the midst of much repentance as we saw with the father of John the Baptist. Luke does not tell us, so we will have to wait until we are in heaven to know the end of that story.

What we do know is that the impact was swift and sure...

12 "Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord."

- This island nation was deceived no more and the light of the Gospel has come to bring hope and life.

Again, Luke does not give us any details about the results of this conversion, but we know from Psalm 2 that it would bring about some real blessings: "10 Now therefore, be wise, O kings; Be instructed, you judges of the earth. 11 Serve the Lord with fear, And rejoice with trembling. 12 Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, And you perish in the way, When His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him."

- The leader or King of Cyprus had put his trust in God and there would be blessings that would follow.

So what does all of this mean for us today?

- First and foremost I think it is a great reminder to us that Jesus has in fact bound the strong man!

Satan has been defeated and bound and the Holy Spirit is NOW plundering his goods and possessions as He fills the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus! This is important for us to understand and believe because Jesus goes on in Luke 11 to tell His own disciples that it makes a real difference regarding which side of the battle you are on: We read this morning the text from Luke where Jesus was confronting those who did not understand that Jesus came to bind up the strong man:

Luke 11:20 "But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. 21 When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils."

- And Jesus goes on to tell His disciples that understanding and believing this is VERY important:

23 "He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters. 24 "When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' 25 And when he comes, he finds it swept and put in order. 26 Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first."

- This is a very sobering picture that Jesus gives us about the nature of the battle we are engaged in, so we should heed His call to believe.

This does not mean that Satan and all of his minions have already been cast into the Lake of Fire. What the Bible teaches is that Satan has been bound and now Jesus is plundering his goods... Those nations whom he had deceived.

Just as Paul & Barnabas confronted demonic forces that were doing their best to keep the devil's goods in place, we must do the same today... All the while believing that the Spirit of God will prevail and all the nations of the earth will be brought under the King of Kings just as the island of Cyprus was in Paul's day.

- We must also remember that it is not our job to be the King of Kings, nor the Holy Spirit.

Our job is to be their servants doing those tasks we have been called on to do well: It might be witnessing to an elected official and it might be changing one of those diapers.

We are also to be prepared for whatever work we might be called upon to do in the future:

- Just as Paul and Barnabas had worked and studied for years to be properly prepared for this journey.

The Apostle Peter gives this wise counsel in his letter to the Saints:

**I Peter 5:6** “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time,<sup>7</sup> casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. **8** Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. **9** Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. **10** But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.”

Now some will argue that what Peter says here is contrary to the concept that Satan is bound now... Nothing could be further from the truth because the Bible does not contradict itself: Remember that Satan was bound for a very specific purpose, that the nations would no longer be deceived. So The Great Commission could be carried out.

- The Kings of the earth still have an obligation to repent and believe as Paulus did in our account
- Satan and his demons still have to opportunity to destroy those who are careless just as Jesus taught!

**Casting out an evil spirit is only half the battle: You must then replace the deception with the truth and live for God...**

- If not then that demon returns with many friends to a nice neat home.

This is a real spiritual battle that we are a part of: Just because we know who wins in the end does not mean we can sit back and be neutral observers. We have the example and teachings of both Jesus and Paul to guide us and we must take them seriously: When Jesus was tempted by Satan He confronted him with the Word of God! If this was important for the Son of God to do, how much more so for us? All of the quotes Jesus gave were from the Book of Deuteronomy... How well do you know that book?  
*[good homework!]*

We read last week about the many trials and tribulations that Paul had on these journeys and in his letter to the Church at Ephesus he gives the Saints instructions on how to face the same battles in their lives... Paul knew that the battle to disciple the nations would continue until Jesus returned and that Satan and his demons would continue to put up whatever resistance they could muster, trying to keep their stuff away from Jesus! And so Paul gives very specific instructions about how we are to be conducting ourselves...

- And we would be wise to heed them well, whether we are confronting a King or civil ruler or the sin nature of one of the covenant children entrusted to our care:

**Ephesians 6:10** “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. **11** Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. **12** For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. **13** Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. **14** Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, **15** and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; **16** above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. **17** And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God; **18** praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints-- **19** and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, **20** for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”

**Communion Meditation: Genesis 14:**

**“14 Now when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his three hundred and eighteen trained servants who were born in his own house, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. 15 He divided his forces against them by night, and he and his servants attacked them and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus.**

**16 So he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the people. 17 And the king of Sodom went out to meet him...**

**18 Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. 19 And he blessed him and said: "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; 20 And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." And he gave him a tithe of all.**