

Part 33 – The Sorcerer of Cyprus

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney Wednesday, May 03, 2016

† Acts 13:1-12

Last Wednesday we covered all of Chapter 12 which dealt with the Vexing of the Church. We saw where King Herod killed James with the sword and then had Peter arrested and planned on killing him but the Lord made a way for him to escape. Then we saw where Herod took glory from the Lord and the Lord stuck him dead and worms ate his body.

Tonight, Lord willing, we are going to try and cover Chapter 13, verses 1-12 which deals with Paul and Barnabas being sent out as missionaries by the Church of Antioch and they have to deal with the Sorcerer of Cyprus.

1 Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

Antioch - this is the 3rd largest City in the Roman Empire at that time. This is where the first Gentile Church began. If you remember in Acts 11:26 the Bible tells us that the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

Barnabas - We first hear about Barnabas in **Acts 4:36-37: And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, 37 Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.** Then we read where he was the one that helped Saul be accepted by the Apostles in Jerusalem. And the Bible refers to him as “a good man.”

Simeon that was called Niger † - “Niger” is a Latin name meaning “black.” Why the name was given is not known. Nothing more is known of him than is mentioned here.

Lucius of Cyrene - Cyrene was in Africa. Lucius is mentioned later being with the apostle Paul when he wrote the Epistle to the Romans 16:21

Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch - He is not mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament. He was brought up with Herod the tetrarch which was “Herod Antipas” son of Herod the Great, to whom Galilee had been left as his part of his father’s kingdom. He is the same Herod that was responsible for having John the Baptist beheaded.

Saul – of course Saul of Tarsus needs no introduction since we have thoroughly covered him in past sermons, but an interesting thing to note, down in **verse 9**, is where Luke, the penman of the Book of Acts, starts referring to him by his Roman name, Paul. He is never referred to again as Saul except when he is telling people about his conversion and is quoting what the Lord called him.

2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. 3 And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

I want you to notice how the early Church approached a ministry, “As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted.” That means that they prayed and sought the

Lord’s council with deep sincerity. When these Old Testament Saints were wanting to get through to God we see that they fasted.

You may remember in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark we read where a man had brought his son that was possessed by a devil to the disciples for them to cast the devil out and they were unable to. So the man goes to Jesus and tells him that the disciples couldn’t cast the devil out of his son and Jesus goes and demands the devil to leave the boy and he left. Then when the disciples asked Jesus how come they were unable to do the same thing he told them this: **Matthew 17:20-21: And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. 21 Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.**

Also, the Apostle Paul writing to the Church in Corinth on how they were to avoid strife with each other and to keep Satan from tempting them he said: “...give yourselves to fasting and prayer.” – 1 Corinthians 7:5b

Now, we do not place much emphasis on fasting these days. Some people may wonder, “are we commanded to fast?” Let me tell you the answer to that, no, there is nowhere in the Bible that commands that we as Christians are to set a time aside for fasting. The Jews were commanded by law to fast 1 time a year and that was on the Day of Atonement. We find that in **Leviticus 16:29: And this shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you:** That little phrase “**afflict your souls,**” is referring to fasting. This is the only place in the Bible where fasting was commanded as a ritual.

The Levitical Law concerning the Day of Atonement is not binding for the New Testament Christian. We do not observe the Day of Atonement because Christ became our eternal sacrifice when he died on the cross and he fulfilled the law.

However, having said that, I would like to say that there is also not a commandment that tells us NOT to fast. But there are certain guidelines the Lord gives us for the times that we choose to fast. The number one guideline being that we keep it to ourselves. We studied this in our Sermon on the Mount Bible Series in:

Matthew 6:16-18: Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. 17 But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; 18 That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

There was one time when the disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus and asked him why his disciples didn’t fast the way that they did and the Pharisees did. **Matthew 9:14-15: Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?**

You see, the Pharisees and apparently the disciples of John the Baptist fasted more than just on the Day of Atonement. They had begun fasting twice a week as part of their religious routine. You remember the Pharisees that was in the Temple to pray

the same time the Publican was and in that Pharisees prayer he mentioned the fact that he fasted twice a week. So, it was all just being religious.

You have probably heard some overly religious person trying to shame you or act more superior to you because they fast and they do this and they do that. What? You mean you don't do that??? That's what these folks were doing to Jesus over this fasting.

15 And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.

The answer that Jesus gave them let them know real fast that their religious fasting was useless, that mourning was usually set aside for times of mourning. All throughout the Bible we read where people fasting during times of mourning. They also fasted when in deep distress. So, no we aren't commanded to fast but fasting may help you empty yourself and get closer to the Lord.

4 So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.

And so starts the first missionary journey of Paul. Selucia is located at the mouth of the Orontes River which also runs by Antioch. It is a distance of approximately 41 miles from Antioch to Selucia traveling by water. They could have sailed this distance within one (1) day.

They then sailed across the Mediterranean Sea to the Island of Cyprus. Cyprus is where Barnabas and most likely, John-Mark both were originally from so they would have felt very much at home there. We read in Collosians 4:10 that tells us that John-Marks mother was Barnabas's sister, so that would make Barnabas, Mark's Uncle. **Collosians 4:10** Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;) Paul referred to him as "Marcus" here.

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.

Here, Luke uses only John when speaking of John-Mark. Why he did that we do not know. But the Bible tells us in Acts 12:12, 12:25, and 15:37 that his name was John who's surname was Mark.

6 And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus: 7 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.

If they traveled the entire length of the isle of Paphos then they traveled 170 miles by foot.

There they meet two men, a Sorcerer named Barjesus, which means, "Son of Joshua," and the Deputy, Sergius Paulus, which would have been like what we would consider a Governor. We see that it was Sergius Paulus who called for Barnabas and Saul to meet with him so he could hear what they were teaching and preaching. You might call him a seeker. He was seeking for truth and he is going to find it.

8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.

Luke gives us the meaning of the name sorcerer, it is Elymas. That is what most people knew him as. He practiced black magic and witchcraft and he certainly did not want these two preachers coming into his town and messing things up. So he gets between them and the deputy and starts some kind of dispute with them hoping to keep the deputy from listening and coming to faith in Christ. He needed the deputy on his side for those times he was skirting around the law or doing something that would be questioned. He no doubt made his living being a sorcerer.

9 Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, 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?

Now, we have covered this many times over the years. Suddenly in the Book of Acts, the human penmen, Luke, start using Saul's Roman name of Paul. God didn't change his name the way he did Abram to Abraham or Jacob to Israel, it is just a different use of his name. Paul would have been known and accepted much more in the Roman dominant places that they would be traveling.

Notice that Paul is being led by the Holy Ghost in what he is doing. He calls Elymas out for who he is, a child of the devil, the enemy of all righteousness. He isn't holding anything back. He accused him of perverting the right ways of the Lord. In other words he is a type of Anti-Christ.

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.

This is Paul's first recorded miracle that we read about in the Bible. He causes blindness to fall upon Elymas. It is quick and immediate judgement. It says that he will be blind for a season, we do not know how long it would last and we never hear from him again but we do see the mercy of God even on this hellish sorcerer by giving him another chance to see again. Some believe that when his sight was restored that he trusted Jesus as his Savior and lived a life for the Lord. That would be great if that happened, but we cannot say that for a fact.

12 Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.

This miracle wrought by God through the Apostle Paul causes the Deputy to believe. We read nothing else about Serigus Paulus from this time on either. But just as a side note, did you notice that Paul's first Christian convert was named Paulus? Just an interesting fact.

† All Scripture from the Authorized King James Version

‡ Albert Barnes Notes, Acts 13:1