

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

R₂L – Resolved to Live: Relentless in Ministry

Acts 13:6-13

6 When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus, 7 who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. 8 But Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. 9 But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him, 10 and said, "You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? 11 "Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time." And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand. 12 Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord. 13 Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John left them and returned to Jerusalem.

There is a lesson I have learned over the years when it comes to being the kind of people God wants us to be; a passionate, committed, focused, Christ-exalting kind of people; a people *resolved to live* not simply to be better than others but more and more for Christ; a people who understand what it means to surrender all to Christ and find excitement, joy and meaning in life by doing so. And the lesson I have learned is this; *there are few who truly share such an excitement.* And why are there so few who share the excitement to live like this? Because beloved, to live all out for Jesus means that we must go all out for Jesus. And to go all out for Jesus means to serve Jesus and His people. To serve Jesus and His people is what we call “ministry” – and when you minister to others, there will be both joys but also sorrows, difficulties and just plain hard times.

And yet, there is no better way to live life than in such complete obedience to Christ. For if you desire joy in your life, live for Christ. As the hymn writer penned:

*Trust and obey for there is no other way
To be happy in Jesus
But to trust and obey.*

There is joy in serving Jesus; but there is also hardship in serving Jesus. People will disappoint, fail you, and let you down. How many people have left a church or refuse to participate in some role in the church because they have been “burned” in the past by someone else in the church? Too many. And part of the problem is that we operate with the misconception that being involved in the church and serving other people should be a bed of roses; that is, until we realize that we are all sinners and if we fail God, we are sure to fail each other. But through it all, there is a joy to be had; a joy that come from obeying Jesus in the ups and downs of ministry.

As so, this morning, I would like to take you on a journey. A journey to the Island of Paphos. Much like going on vacation somewhere and taking a picture of your first day, our text presents us with the first snapshot from the very first missionary journey of Saul and Barnabas and John Mark. This is the first concerted effort made by the church to reach the Gentile nations with the gospel of Jesus. There is much we can learn from what happened to the church’s first

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missionaries while at Paphos; and one of the key lessons is this, that ministry, serving Jesus, is full of ups and downs.

And so because ministry does have its down, we must not become weary or faint-hearted. We must not allow our hurt feelings to stay with us but simply know that until Jesus comes again, our lives spent serving Him will have its triumphs as well as its trials. But the key thing to remember is this, we are either making disciples, people resolved to life for Jesus in every moment of their lives, or we are making concessions, giving reasons and excuses as to why we are not obeying the command to see people, to see our spouses, our children, our family, our friends, our co-workers, our neighbors and even strangers grow in the grace and knowledge of the person and work of Jesus.

I can promise you this, as you get increasingly engaged in fulfilling the Great Commission, that command of Jesus to make disciples of all nations, there will be delights beyond description. But I also promise you that there will also be conflicts, disappointments, and times of loneliness that will bring you to the end of yourself. And we call this, "ministry!" Want to sign up? But here is another truth in all this, that regardless of the trials and difficulties, and in the midst of every triumph and joy, the one constant, the one for sure thing you can count on is that the Lord is with us. HE will never leave us or forsake us. And His strength is sufficient to carry us through it all, if we will submit ourselves to living in light of His Word, His promise and His ways.

Now, I am not sure how you view the word or the idea of "ministry". The word simply means "the act of service" and it belongs to everyone who belongs to Jesus Christ. It is not just the work of the pastor or elders, in fact, according to Ephesians 4:12, my God-given job is to explain the word of God to you so that you will know it, and apply it so that you may do the work of service, the work of the ministry.

Saul, Barnabas and John Mark were embarking on a serious work of ministry and throughout text I would have you notice some of the ups and downs these men encountered when seeking to serve the Lord. And what you will see are men who are relentless in ministry, for even after their very first experience after being sent by the church to preach Jesus, they keep pressing on. Let me give to you first then a four-fold Biblical view of what ministry is followed by some applications, ways by which we can live out ministry in our lives.

I. Ministry is opportunity (6-7).

6 When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus, 7 who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.

Ministry is opportunity. For those who seek to serve Jesus, there really is never a dull moment; never a time that cannot be used to impart some kind of truth or teaching of Jesus. A Christian walking with Jesus will never be bored.

Let me set the stage for you here. The year is around 45 AD, some 12-15 years since Jesus was raised from the dead. The church, which began in Jerusalem, had spread up north to reached Antioch in Syria. As the good news hit Antioch, many who heard received the truth that Jesus died for sinners and that a sinner's only hope was to believe that Jesus paid their penalty on the cross and to believe He really died for them and really rose for them so that by His resurrection, He might empower them by His Holy Spirit to live according to His Word. As the church in Antioch heard this teaching, it was their resolve to share it, not just with the residents of Antioch, but beyond their city. Thus we see the first concerted effort at foreign missions here. Just as the Spirit had commanded, the church set apart Barnabas and Saul to become

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missionaries. Being sent off, they began what would be Saul’s (also known as Paul) first missionary journey recorded in Acts. Barnabas and John Mark went with Paul and they first stopped at Salamis on the island of Cyprus (13:4-5) where “they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews.” That is where we left the team; let us notice what happens next according to verse 6.

When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos

Paphos was the capital city of Cyprus. We are not told if they stopped at any other cities or towns on their trek across the island, but we know they were proclaiming the word of God wherever they went. And one thing this reminds us, that ministry, serving God, and particularly making disciples, passionate followers of Jesus requires going! Maybe it seems it should go without saying, but I will say it anyway, the Great Commission of Jesus in Matthew 28:19 says,

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...

The command is not “go”, but “make disciples. Jesus is saying in effect, “Wherever you go, wherever you are, wherever you find yourself in your going, make disciples.” Ministry involved going, purposely going to people, talking to people, sharing with people, caring for people. The lost rarely if ever come to us and so we must go to them even as Paul and Barnabas did. The journey from Salamis to Paphos is about 100 miles and from what we know, most of it was probably done on foot. Some of us would be done after walking a mile, but these men walked over a hundred just here at the outset of their ministry to preach Jesus. Let me give you this insight. According to *The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands*, “The distances traveled by the apostle Paul are nothing short of staggering. In point of fact, the New Testament registers the equivalent of about 13,400 airline miles that the great apostle journeyed; and if one takes into account the circuitous roads he necessarily had to employ at times, the total distance traveled would exceed that figure by a sizeable margin.”

Here are some of the first of those 13,400 miles. And here we find that the Lord presented them with a unique opportunity as verses 6-7 continue, “*they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus, 7 who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.*” Their opportunity was two-fold.

First, Paul and the team met Elymas. In verse 8, Luke records that this man’s name means “magician”. This man was crafty in character. The name “Elymas,” is actually a Semitic name meaning “sorcerer.” His actual name however was “Bar-Jesus”, which, oddly enough means, Son of Jesus. That was his name. And it is kind of ironic because Bar Jesus was a *Jewish sorcerer*. How is that for a contradiction? For sorcery was prohibited in Jewish law. To speak of Bar Jesus the Jewish Sorcerer would be like me trying to talk to you about a “Christian drug-dealer”! Those words simply do not belong together.

The point is that this man was a fake, literally a pseudo prophet, a false prophet. I find it strange that a man who wears the greatest name ever, “Jesus,” a name that means *salvation*, preaches the opposite. For he is not concerned with seeing people know the true God and being saved, but rather in using people, as we will see shortly. Elymas was with the proconsul, meaning he aligned himself with a man of political clout. This is what the kingdom of darkness does, aligns itself with the political powers in order to sway policy and practice. But there is another opportunity...

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Second, Paul and the team met Sergius Paulus. Luke informs us that Sergius was a “proconsul” which means he was the chief Roman official in the area. He was a man of influence. Luke also tells us this man was intelligent. Did you even stop to wonder why Luke tells us this, that Sergius was a man of intelligence? The critics of Christianity call faith in Jesus a crutch, and that only fools would believe the things of the Bible. Yet here is a man of intelligence and he is investigating Christianity. Psalm 53:1 says, “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’” A person is not a fool just because he humbles himself in search for the truth. The true fool is the one who sees the evidence of God in creation and still says, “There is no God.” Beloved, here then, in the heart of Sergius we see the Spirit of God at work, opening his spiritual eyes to understand Jesus.

How do we know that the Holy Spirit was at work? Because Sergius was wanting to hear God’s word. Notice our text tells us this very fact, that he sent for Barnabas and Saul because he **“sought to hear the word of God.”** The Holy Spirit creates thirst, He opens doors, He prepares hearts to hear. Not everyone is ready to hear the word of God, not until the Spirit is at work in them. But this is we can share the gospel of Jesus with confidence. We are simply called to preach the truth and then, those whom God has prepared will listen. Our job it to watch for such prepared hearts, those seeking to know more, to want to learn about Jesus. We need to keep our eyes open looking for the prepared hearts. Notice the centrality of God’s Word in our mission. It is the Spirit who creates interest for the word of God. We are to proclaim the word of God. And, in a perfect word of our making, all we share the word of God with would believe it, right? But as you know, while ministry is opportunity to speak to all kinds of people about Jesus, ministry also involves a second aspect...

II. Ministry involves opposition (8).

8 But Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.

The form of opposition for Paul and his team came by way of the man named Bar-Jesus. Notice here in verse 8 that there are two things that Bar-Jesus or Elymas the magician is said to have done.

First, Elymas opposed the messengers. Our text says that he **“was opposing”** them. The KJV says he “withstood” them. The word “opposing” means “to set against” – in essence, he got in their way to resist them, to keep them from moving on. Beloved, as most of you know, and is increasingly the case, there are few that cheer when God’s Word is preached. The preaching and teaching of the gospel, the simple conversation about the meaning of God’s word, well, it threatens Satan’s turf as well as Satan’s messengers. Elymas went on the offensive. He was not going to simply stand by and let this truth be proclaimed without attempting to undermine it. You see, the problem he had was this, if his employer, the proconsul, listened to and believed this teaching about Jesus, he would lose his influence, his clout and his job.

Second, Elymas sought to distort the message. Our text says that he was **“seeking to turn the proconsul from the faith.”** The word “seeking” means “to plot against.” This man was plotting, planning ways in which to turn the proconsul’s faith. What is faith? Beloved, faith is involves action. Notice here that it is **“the faith”** which speaks of the whole body of what we believe. *The faith* is the truth about God and what He did through Jesus Christ to save a people for His glory. *The faith* is the account of God’s sacrificial, redeeming love toward us who do not deserve it.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son; the Father gave Jesus to die on behalf of sinners, and then conquered death on the third day. So that, to the end that whoever

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believes in Him, in this work of God on their behalf, should not perish but have eternal life. That is the meaning of John 3:16. Beloved, the gift of eternal life is given by God to those who admit they cannot earn it and receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Here, Elymas is trying to turn the proconsul from the faith by saying there is another way than that of Jesus. It is to say that Jesus may be a way, but He is not the only way. All paths do not lead to God, in fact, all but one lead to Hell. But here is Elymas, seeking, plotting, devising ways to turn the proconsul from the faith. I do love the work “seeking” here. He was trying, but he could not succeed. God’s sovereign work in salvation is effectual. When God initiates in the human heart the desire to know and follow Jesus, God *will* produce His intended effect. And this is no reading something into the text that is not there for drop down with me to verse 48 and notice what we read there, **“When the Gentiles heard this [the same truths about Jesus as the proconsul heard], they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.”** Do not miss the order of events here. It is God who appoints and then those whom He appoints believe. The KJV says it this way, “As many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” God has ordained, set out, appointed a people to save and He will save His people. The evidence of His gracious choice is seen when they believe. How do you know if you are appointed to eternal life? It is simple, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

As we read what is taking place here among Paul, Barnabas, Elymas and Sergius, let me tell the moment was intense. We have one man, Sergius Paulus, interested in the Word of God, wanting to hear the word of God. On the other side is the venom of Elymas set out to strike and neutralize the gospel message. The verbs in our text indicate that Elymas would stop at nothing to derail faith. We need to realize that sharing Christ with someone is not some mere intellectual exercise; it is not just teaching some facts about Jesus. Preaching Jesus is spiritual warfare, an epic battle. It is not an exaggeration to say that Paul and Barnabas were literally battling for the soul of Sergius Paulus. Ministry involves opposition and in fact, one way you know that you are ministering the things of the Lord is to be found in that battle. The devil will leave you alone if you are not a threat to him. We are soldiers, beloved. And while we live in our comfortable homes and eat good food, and enjoy many extra’s in life, we easily forget that we are in an all-out war with the forces of darkness.

If we would but grab ahold of this idea, I believe it would change a long of things. For one, I believe we would look at unsaved people differently. We easily see other people as the enemy but in reality they are lost in the blindness of their sin and bound by the chains of our enemy. Will you fight to see them released? Will you fight to see that family member of yours released, that dear friend? Knowing you are in a battle makes you look at prayer differently, for in praying we are pleading without Commander-in-Chief for reinforcements for the battle. So yes, ministry involves opportunities and it involves opposition, but there is graciously a third component...

III. Ministry involves overcoming-power (9-12).

9 But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him, 10 and said, "You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? 11 "Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time." And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand. 12 Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord.

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Generally we consider opposition as bad and thus we seek to avoid it, right? But this is not so with God. For God, opposition is simply the vehicle by which He creates more opportunity. Notice God’s over-coming power at work in Paul here in verses 9-12.

First, notice how God silenced the critic in verses 9-11. Listen to the polite, politically correct language used by Paul here, *9 But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him, 10 and said, “You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? 11 “Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time.”*

Does that sound “Christian?” Remember how Elymas would not stand by without saying a word to undermine the faith? Well, notice that Paul first preached as he was summoned before the proconsul, but then as Elymas voiced his opposition, Paul would not stand by without pointing out Elymas’ errors. Paul knew that the hardness of Elymas was harming not only himself but others.

Beloved, it is one thing not to believe the truth, and that is bad enough. But It is even worse to oppose the truth proclaimed and then to block others from hearing it. If Paul was upset, and it seems he was, it was not personal reasons. This was an offense to God, God’s gospel, and God’s plan and to God’s Son. Remember as well that this rebuke was prompted by the Holy Spirit for our text says clearly that Paul “filled by the Holy Spirit.” I picture Paul pointing his finger at Elymas as six times he uses the pronoun “you” in verses 10-11. This is anything but gentle.

Paul first confronts Elymas’ crime saying in verse 10, *“You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord?”* There is a purposeful play on words. In essence Paul is saying, “You call yourself Bar-Jesus (‘son of Jesus’) but you are actually Bar-Devil (‘son of the devil!’)” The final question, *will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord?*, indicates this was not a onetime act, but had been going on for some time.

Next, in the first part of verse 11, Paul declares Elymas’ condemnation saying, *“Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time.”* Elymas was clearly spiritually blind but now he was about to experience physical blindness. God sometimes gives us a taste of what think we want. Paul’s rebuke here reminds me of Hebrews 10:31 which says, **“It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”** Elymas was about to fall into the hands of God’s judgment.

Then, at the end of verse 11, Elymas feels the consequences of his conduct. We read, *“And immediately [there was no delay] a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand.”* The irony of a man who had sought to keep his employer in the dark was now put into darkness by God. Can you imagine? Does this seem intense on God’s part? What if I were to say to you that this was an act of mercy on God’s part? What did Elymas deserve? Death. What did he get? Blindness and an opportunity to consider what he had done and his own need for Jesus.

IT is also ironic that God used blindness here with Paul’s first encounter on his missionary journey. Why? It was Paul who had sought to keep others from believing in Jesus. He too was a religious man and was regarded as a zealot. And God blinded Paul to get his attention. The very man who pronounced this judgment on Elymas was once blind himself. This is the overcoming power of God, power that silenced a critic, but it did something else as well...

Second, God secured a convert. In verse 12, in contrast to what had happened to Elymas, we read, *“Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord.”* Whereas Elymas experienced darkness, Sergius Paulus saw the

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light. Why did the proconsul believe? Our text says that the man “**saw what had happened.**” Not only did God get Elymas’ attention, but he also got Sergius’ attention by the blinding. Sergius saw a miracle and the purpose of miracles in the Bible is to give attention to the *message*, not to bring attention to the messenger. Sergius was not impressed by Paul, but was impressed by the person whom Paul preached. Ministry involves God’s over-coming power; it overcomes the critics’ attacks and it overcomes sinful hearts.

Now we come to the final component of ministry revealed in our text...

IV. Ministry involves obstacles (13).

Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John left them and returned to Jerusalem.

There are two key things that took place here. **First**, Paul and his team were experiencing a dramatic change. Not only were they leaving the island of Paphos and heading toward the mainland, Perga, which is modern day Turkey. But notice the subtle change in the missionary team that is taking place. Who was it that took charge in dealing with Elymas? It was Paul. And now, as the team leaves Paphos, notice how Luke refers to them, as “**Paul and His companions...**” We see the roles of the team changing. Notice that Barnabas’ name is not even mentioned in verse 13.

It is true that there is a great need for *leaders* in the church, but there is also another need; the need for leaders who know how to follow. Barnabas is a man of great humility, for it was him who stood by Paul after his conversion even with the others were skeptical. It was him who sought out Paul for the ministry. It was him who gave Paul his first ministry job; and now, it is him who is allowing Paul to take the lead in this missionary journey. Change can be an obstacle, a real hindrance for some. Maybe it is for you. May God grant us the spirit of Barnabas.

There is a second obstacle that we find here in our text. I imagine that this was even more difficult than dealing with Elymas and this had just as much potential to damage the ministry as did the magician. Not only did the team undergo change, but they also experienced a setback. There at the end of verse 13 we are told that John Mark left them. Not only did he not continue on to Perga, but he did not even go home to Antioch but rather to Jerusalem. We are not told why John Mark left. All we have is speculation. Maybe he did not care for the pressures of a traveling ministry. Maybe the whole scene with Elymas intimidated him. Maybe he was upset that Barnabas did not seem to be taking the lead. Perhaps he was homesick. We simply do not know. Whatever the reason, we know that according to Acts 15:38 Paul regarded it as *desertion* plain and simple.

John Mark’s desertion would strain the relationship between Paul and Barnabas as about four years later these two went separate ways just prior to Paul’s second missionary journey. With the young John Mark gone, Paul and Barnabas would now carry the full load of getting their supplies from one place to the next. To get to Perga required a 3,500 foot climb up and across the coastal range and after that they would travel another hundred miles north beyond the mountains to the Roman colony of Pisidian Antioch. But the point is this, that ministry is full of disappointments. That is just a fact. And one of the greatest heartaches ever felt in a ministry is when we see a fellow worker go A.W.O.L. (absent without leave) for the truth is, it is hard to find dependable, relentless people when it comes to ministry. As the song says, “Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love...”. That is the flesh – “prone to wander”; prone to give up, give out, give over, given in. But you beloved are called to be relentless in ministry. If you are going to be in ministry, if you are going to serve, then be wholehearted, all in, relentless. In our text, it was better in God’s eyes to have two wholehearted workers than two wholehearted worker

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along with one half-hearted worker. How committed are you to the ministry, the service of the local church? Does the word "wholehearted" describe you?

Now do not get too worked up about John Mark's desertion as in about 14 years (that's Acts time not my preaching time) John Mark and Paul will be reunited and working together.

The point of all I have said this morning, and what we have seen in our text is that ministry is full of ups and downs. And if you do not know that, or you are not ready for that, you will give up. We are called to be relentless. Relentless when we have opportunities, relentless when we have opposition, relentless as we experience over-coming power, and relentless when we face obstacles that seek to derail us.

Now, I would invite all you to the second how when we look at some of the applicational lessons we learn from this passage, but let me close by reminding you that ministry, service to God and even the heart and commitment to serve Him is not something we generate in ourselves. Yes, we must be determined; we must be steadfast and immovable, always abounding, placing ourselves in the midst of the work of the Lord, but the heart to be so resolute comes first with a living, vital, and committed relationship to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. To be relentless in ministry one must be saved? Are you saved? Have you surrendered your life, your hopes and your dreams to Jesus? Have you confessed yourself to be a sinner and Jesus to be your Savior? Have you sought from God a changed heart that longs for Him and His ways to become your ways. That is where we must start. And if you have started there, are you continuing, continuing to ask God to change you, to mold you, to rid you more and more of yourself so that you might reflect more and more of your Savior? As we do this, our hearts will long for serving Him whenever, wherever and however He leads us.

Soli Deo Gloria

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