

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.

Having read our main Scripture text, I would invite you to turn with me to another verse, a verse that I have been pondering all week and, if you will allow me this moment of thy version, I will seek to relate to our Acts 13 text. To turn with me if you would to the gospel of Luke 9:23, the gospel of Luke 9:23. And there we read, **"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me."**

As we've been studying Acts 13, our theme has been simply this a resolve to live a life worthy of the gospel. Here in Luke 9:23, Jesus makes this statement to his disciples and I would like to flesh out for us just a bit of this meaning here and a bit of application and then we will see how it relates to our Acts 13 text. I would have you notice that Jesus begins with the goal or the aim for which a person may long. He says, "If anyone wishes to come after Me..." In other words, Jesus is saying if anyone would join Me, if anyone would be a part of what I am doing, if anyone would be called by My name and associate themselves with Me; and then he introduces three imperatives, three commands, three things that must be done in order to be one of those who come after Him.

The first command is this, **"he must deny himself..."** The verb "deny" means "to speak against, to disavow, to neglect or to refuse." Ultimately, it means to contradict, literally to contradict yourself. The word is suggestive of taking what we might naturally think of ourselves, about ourselves, what we might be able to do; and the contradict it, to do something completely different. It implies there's something to replace ourselves with and the text is clear that the replacement is Jesus, His attitudes and His actions.

If we would join Christ, it begins with self-denial, it begins with the recognition that I'm not going to do things my own way but God's way. It is a resolve to live no longer for myself but for him who died and rose again for my sake. Beloved, it is a recognition that if left to myself, if dependent upon myself, I will by no means bring glory and honor to God. As you've heard me say many times over the past few weeks, to deny oneself is the equals length of saying that Jesus must increase and I must decrease; that somehow through my actions and my attitudes, through my words and my deeds, Jesus is appearing and I am disappearing. This is in part what it means to deny oneself in it is the first command given by Jesus by which we are told we can hit the target of coming after Him. Let me add another angle to this command of Jesus, as the tense of the verb that Jesus used is one that suggests once and for all action. In other words if we are to come after Christ there must be a resolution from the very start that this is no longer about me,

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

and that now I have a Deacon hermit nation, a once for all commitments to pursue Christ with all that I have with all that I am. It is the placing of Jesus first in your life, in your marriage, in your parenting, in your obedience to your parents, in your job, in your school, in every facet of life Jesus becomes first and foremost; that’s what it means to deny yourself.

But, Jesus isn’t finished yet, and he gives yet as second command saying, **“he must...take up his cross...”** Now what does it mean to take up one’s cross? For those who were hearing these words of Jesus the idea of taking up one’s cross would be the it hit of the of heaping suffering and shame upon himself. In the thinking of the day, and according to Scripture, cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree, across. We sing a song, “The Old Rugged Cross,” and one of the lines says that the cross is, *“the emblem of suffering and shame.”* There is nothing good about a cross, nothing good until Jesus. For an immediate context, to take up one’s cross, is a further explanation of what it means to deny oneself, but with a twist. We were told to deny ourselves, now were told to take up to pick up something. What is it that we are picking up? We’re picking up the cross. We are picking up the marker of Christ. And while the world looks upon the cross in accordance with the song, that it is the emblem of suffering and shame, the cross is not the emblem of suffering and shame alone for the Christian, but it is also the emblem of triumph and glory. The cross is not some sad silly story, but is the record of Christ’s victory over death and over sin. And Jesus said that to those who would join Him and be a part of what He was doing, that these are to pick up that emblem; that banner that others see as shameful and others look upon with disdain and sometimes disgust, and rather to wear it as a badge of honor because you know that that cross means so much more than what the world understands.

The verb **“take up”** can literally speak of a nautical activity, that of weighing anchor. The ship of your life is not to be docked in the harbor, but if you are coming after Christ, you are to weigh anchor, to take up the cause of Christ, to wear His emblem, to display His banner, to be as soldiers going forth in war carrying the flag of Christ and declaring the greatness of our captain who is Christ. As you read this verb of command, **“take up”** it sounds as though Jesus is speaking in the present tense, but the way that He spoke it speaks again of a once for all action. It would be awkward in the English to say it this way, but we could say that if anyone would come after Christ he must have taken up his cross. So why do we not translated that way? Well, in part because of the next little word in the verse, the word “daily.” How do you have a once for all action, the taking up of the cross, a dying to self, a putting on of the very emblem of Christ, and do that once for all action daily? That’s a good question. And my response to that question is this, that as we first come after Christ we are to once for all deny ourselves and recognize that this is not about us but it’s about Jesus, but then daily, I must once and for all, at the beginning of each day, take up that cross, die to myself, reminded myself that by taking up the emblem of the cross I am declaring daily that I belong to Jesus and that Jesus belongs to me; and I will spend the rest of that day seeking to proclaim not myself, but Jesus.

And then Jesus gives the final and third command of this statement saying **“he must...follow me.”** The verb “follow” means *“to be on the same road, to accompany someone on the way.”* It is a call to be a continual traveling companion with Jesus. What I find interesting about the command is that it goes contrary to some of our understandings of what it means to walk with Christ. We often think more along the lines that we walk through life and Jesus *joins* us. There was a song sometime back made reference to Jesus taking the wheel, which implies that at some point I was at the wheel; but that’s not what we see here. What we see here is that we are to join up with Jesus, we are to be following His lead, we are to be sensitive to His word, and His ways. It is not that we are setting the direction, that we are setting the tone, that we are the ones in charge, and Jesus just graciously joins us; the call is for you to get on board with Jesus.

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

Unlike the previous two commands that were written in a past tense indicating a once for all action, this verb is in the present tense and thus we could say that the command is to follow and keep following, and always be following Jesus.

This one simple verse reveals to us the great process and aim of discipleship. If you would come after Christ, if you would be His, if you would be resolved to live for Him, then *there must be a putting off of self, a putting on of Christ, and the pursuit of always following His lead*. To put this in another way I would say to you, just be done with self once and for all, then take up your cross daily, once for all remembering that we have died to self so that we might live to and for Christ; then follow and keep following Jesus. This is not a be true to yourself or be who you really are statement but a call to contradict yourself and follow Jesus.

Now what does all of this have to do with Acts 13? Well, just as Jesus began His exhortation with the call to self-denial, we saw in Acts 13:2 a church wanting to be in the heart of God's will and doing so through prayer and fasting. You may recall that we noted both of those activities, particularly fasting, is the denying self of something that may be otherwise good, and even otherwise necessary, but the priority of this congregation was to be found in the heart of God's will and so they regularly practice times of corporate self denial, they denied themselves. As they did this self of denial, the Holy Spirit spoke to them and gave them the commission to set apart Paul and Barnabas for a task of ministry. And just what was that ministry? That ministry was, as we see in verse five, is the proclamation of the word of God, a preaching of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This congregation in general, and these particular men specifically, were taking up the cross, dying to self, and putting upon themselves the very emblem of Jesus. And, according to verse six, they were relentless in their pursuit of ministry.

Let me remind you what ministry is? Ministry is not something that just the pastor and elders and deacons do. Ministry is simply serving Jesus, it is following Jesus, wherever He takes you, whether to an island called Cyprus, or a neighborhood in Rogers, or Bentonville, or wherever you live, or to the neighbor across the street, or to the worker at some store; our ministry, your ministry, your service to God and to His people is to proclaim Jesus to one another and to anyone with whom you can gain an audience.

All of this brings us up to date with where we are in our text. Last week we began looking at another aspect of our resolve to live for Jesus, that resolve being *the relentless pursuit of ministry*, the determined effort in serving God, serving His people, and serving others by being a witness, a testimony, and a monument of the grace of Jesus. Last week I sought to walk you through four lessons concerning ministry that are gleaned from verses 6 to 13. And one of the underlying themes that we learn as we read these verses is that *ministry is not always easy*. Serving people and even serving God is not easy, it's not convenient, it doesn't always fit into our plans. And thus we end up having to –listen- contradict ourselves in order to be faithful in our service to God. We must deny ourselves if we are to rightly serve God. And so I was wanting to walk you through four aspects of serving God that reveal to us the up and down nature of what we call ministry. Ministry is oftentimes filled with great joy, and great triumph; but it can also be filled with difficulties and obstacles. So let me remind you of the first two aspects of what ministry is and what ministry involves so that we can finish up the final two points.

First, let me remind you that **ministry is opportunity**. Ministry is and involves opportunity. Every moment of our lives is an opportunity to serve God or to serve ourselves. In verse six we see that Paul and Barnabas and John Mark were sent out, told the go, given a charge. Stop and think that they could have squandered many opportunities. And yet we are told that they went throughout the island doing what? They were proclaiming the word of God; they were talking

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

about Jesus. Well that’s fine and dandy, they are missionaries, they are supposed to do that, but that is not me. Yes beloved it is you. Jesus has commanded us that wherever we go, wherever we are, our first thought is not to get ahead in the workplace, not to get A’s in our classes, not to look forward to some vacation, not that any of these things are bad in and of themselves; but our first goal is the seeking of His kingdom and His righteousness. Our first desire is to see people brought into the kingdom of which Jesus is the King. And when our minds get turned to that, then wherever we go and wherever we are becomes an opportunity to serve God by proclaiming Jesus.

Second, let me remind you that **ministry involves opposition**. I promise you that if you are full on, full out, turned on for the purpose of proclaiming Christ, there will be people who oppose you; there will be people who want to contradict you, to deny you, marginalized you, intimidate you, shut you up, shut you down. This is what we find in the person of Bar Jesus, Elymas, the sorcerer. I find it interesting that the very first person that were told Paul and Barnabas get to talk to, although they obviously talked to others, but for the purpose of Luke’s writing, the first person that Paul and Barnabas speak to is not receptive to the gospel, but rather is antagonistic to it. This man, Bar Jesus, is a crafty, skilled, and sinister antagonist to Paul, Barnabas and John Mark. For many of us, the encounter with a man such as Bar Jesus would be enough to send us packing, but Paul and Barnabas would prove to be relentless in ministry. But, on that side know we don’t know how much this encounter played into John Mark’s going home and failure to be relentless ministry. Beloved, we should not be afraid of opposition in ministry as Jesus Himself said if they hated Me, if they hated Me – how much more will they hate you? (John 15:18) And thus opposition to ministry, to telling people about Jesus and what He has done and what He is like and what He will do for all will call upon His name, for anyone who would come after Him, such opposition is a positive because it means you’re doing something right.

So this is where we have been: ministry is and involves opportunity; and ministry is and involves opposition. Now, let us move forward and consider the final two points of what ministry involves it makes an application.

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.

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

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

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 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...

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

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 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

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

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

Copyright © 2013 Edward K. Godfrey. *This message is the sole property of the copyright holder and may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this message must contain the above copyright notice. This message may not be copied in part (except for small quotations used with citation of source), edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of the copyright holder. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Edward K. Godfrey, Pastor, Hope Community Bible Church, and 2300 South 13th Street, Rogers, AR 72758.*