

Acts 13 - John Karmelich

Many years ago when I first started this writing ministry, my best friend who's also in ministry, warned me that when one uses their lives to make a difference for Jesus, "stuff happens". He meant when one's making a difference for Jesus, a sure sign of that difference is unexpected problems occur. After doing ministry work for several decades now I'm positive this is true. I don't fear it, I just know if I'm making a difference, dark forces exist that try to prevent one from making a difference for Jesus. I'm as sure of that as I'm breathing!

I open with that thought as Chapter 13 is a prime example of it. The focus of Acts switches here from Peter to Paul. For the rest of the book, the primary focus is on Paul's missionary journeys. I'd like you to consider as you study Paul's sermons how he caters them to his audience. Yes, he preaches Jesus as the center point of each message, but if he's talking to a religious Jewish audience he gives a lot of Old Testament quotes. If he's talking to non-Jewish people, there are no bible quotes. My point is as we use our lives as a witness for Jesus, always consider our target audience at that moment!

Probably best if I describe this chapter at this point. Then I'll talk more about how this affects us as we go through our lives! To backtrack a bit, Chapter 12 dealt with Peter being put in jail and got "sprung" by an angel. The chapter ended with the death of King Herod, the man ultimately responsible for Peter being in prison. The last line of the chapter talked about two men named Barnabas and Saul (yes, Paul the same guy) returning from seeing all of that to their home in Antioch, which is today part of Turkey.

Chapter 13 opens by listing a few Christian men also in Antioch. While they are praying, God made it somehow obvious He's called Paul and Barnabas to go on the road for Him. I have usually found when one does ministry work, God makes some aspect clear and we need to figure out the rest. He didn't say to Paul, "go here", just to "get moving". I'd argue God's regularly saying to us, "I gave you a brain, go figure out what's the logical thing to do next!" In this case Barnabas was from the island of Cyprus (as stated in Acts 4:36). It wasn't too far from where they were. Paul and Barnabas took God's order to hit the road, and decided to hit Cyprus as their first stop. It's a large island east of Greece. Half of it is part of Turkey today and the other half is part of Greece today.

If you recall, I said this chapter was about dealing with "demonic resistance". So how do I know if I'm dealing with a rotten person or "bad spiritual forces"? We don't. We just know that people who aren't committed to use their lives for Jesus are under the influence of the world! Something to remember as we deal with our nonbelieving friends and relatives. Anyway in Cyprus, there was a magician who did not like what Paul was preaching. I'll just say to mess with someone called by God to be a witness for Him (that's us folks) is dangerous for one's health! Paul chewed out the magician and recalling how he was blinded by God in Chapter 9, Paul figured, "I'll see if God gave me the power to do that here!" He told the magician he'll be blind for a while. We don't know how long he was blind as the story changes focus. Why can't we make "blind" those who are harming us? For starters, those who don't know Jesus are already blind to the truth. That's why I pray for people's hearts to be open to God in their lives. We can't stop dark spiritual forces from attacking, but we just know God will win in the end!

From the island Paul and Barnabas traveled to Antioch, Pisidia. It's a different city with the same name as the one Paul and Barnabas started in. It's in Asia Minor (part of Turkey today). Paul was starting to do what he loved, speaking in the local synagogue. Paul began by giving a Jewish history lesson. That was to validate himself as Jewish, and to show how the Old Testament ties to Jesus. Paul spoke of John the Baptist as it was common knowledge even in this town. He then spoke of Jesus and explained how

specific Old Testament predictions in the Psalms tie to Jesus (and not to King David). His point here is that much of the Old Testament points to Jesus and Paul did his best to explain all of this.

OK John, hold your horses for a second. Why should I care about all of this? Odds are good, I'll never speak to a religious Jewish audience about Jesus. The underlying point is we're called to be His witness to the world. God uses our gifts and desires and molds them to be used by Him. Remember Paul grew up as a devout Jewish man so he was ideal to do this job. All of us have been in situations where we're saying, "We're not the right person to help or I don't know the answer to that question so I'll get back to you on that as to solve this issue". Yes whenever and however we will be a witness for Jesus we'll have to deal with resistance as we're about to find out from Paul's story here.

By the way Paul didn't do an altar call. He just said in effect "Heed the words of the prophets", which refers to the bible prophets not himself and then he left. After that, some left with Paul as they wanted to hear more. The following Sabbath Paul was at it again. A bunch of the synagogue leaders didn't like the fact Paul was drawing people away from them. If you want to see who is truly willing to give their lives for Jesus, "hit them in the pocketbook"! That's when spiritual resistance "springs it's ugly head"!

Since it was God's will for Paul and Barnabas to spread the Gospel, I'll just say this was effective. OK, I accept the fact Paul was called to do this, but God never told me to be His witness! You're wrong on that! Jesus said we (that's you and me) are to be His witnesses to the world! No, it doesn't mean all of us have to pack our bags and go to a foreign place. As a sign reads on my old church as one left out of the parking lot, "You are now entering your mission fields!"

By now hopefully we all get the idea we're all called to use our lives as a witness for Jesus. Like Paul, in one form or another we'll get resistance to our efforts as "it comes with the territory". We don't have to fear the resistance, just realize that God allows it. Why is it there? First of all, people don't want to give control of their lives over to God. Second, God gave Satan a specific time period to rule over this world. Think of it this way, heaven won't have an infinite number of people but a finite number. So to slow down that finite number from occurring, Satan works through his dominion to delay that number! So whether we like it or not, that's the game we're involved with. The important thing is to understand the side each of us are on and what's our role in all of this.

With that said, now that I've scared everyone half to death, don't panic. Realize that God's in control as He wants to work through us to make a difference for Him. If interested, on the same page where you downloaded this summary is a detailed lesson on Chapter 13. That's on a verse-by-verse basis. To read that, click on one of the other two links on this chapter. You're always welcome to e-mail me. I hope you like this. Thanks, John