

# Acts 13:13-52 | Bill Howell

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[0:00] Well, it's a privilege to be with you this morning. I heard an interesting observation last week. Did you know that John the Baptist and Frosty the Snowman have something in common. They both have the same middle name.

! We appreciate your prayers for the Lord's work at Storybook Lodge. We have a winter retreat coming up December 26th to the 31st. We're looking forward to 100 plus young people and others gathered together at that time. So we pray that the Lord will be honored.

And then Teddy is telling me, he's going to tell me about something in April. I know what it is.

Teddy's going to come up for a young adult retreat that we're going to have in April and he's going to be sharing some lessons. So if anybody wants to come up and hitch a ride with Teddy, who knows what, might get a caravan from St. Louis up that way at that time.

So the study is in Acts chapter 13. And it's a special transition point in Acts. We switch from Peter's focus on reaching souls in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria to Paul's focus on going to the uttermost parts of the earth.

It's a continuation of the church's expansion, explosion. It began with the Jews. From this point on, there are going to be a multitude of Gentiles being brought to salvation.

[1:27] Chapter 13, verse 1. Notice a variety of leaders in this church at Antioch. There's Barnabas. He was a Levite from Cyprus.

Barnabas is his nickname, but that's how we read of him in the scriptures. He means son of encouragement. Then Simeon, he's a black man with a Jewish name. There's Lucius, perhaps an Arab. He's from Libya. That's where Cyrene is located.

Mananias grew up in the same household as Herod Antipas. Wow, we don't know exactly what that means, but they certainly had different life journeys. Here's Mananias converted to the Lord.

And here's Herod Antipas, who slays John the Baptist and mocked the Lord and did not have an eternal end for good.

And then there's Saul, the former Christian terrorist. And he's in that group. What a nice racial and personality mixture. Verses 2 and 3.

[2:47] While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

So they're fasting and praying. We're not sure what the focus was. Were they burdened with evangelizing the world? Were they burdened that they've got a lot of gifted men in this assembly and so they want to know, What do we do? Do we hive off? Lord, what would you have us to do? You wonder, did Saul say he felt the urging to fulfill what the Lord had for him in reaching out to the Gentiles? Because he knew right from his conversion that he was a chosen vessel to go out in a special way to the Gentiles.

You wonder, did one of the prophets announce this led by the Spirit? Well, we don't know the details, but we know what happened.

Verse 4. So being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. So they weren't sent out by a mission board, but they were sent out by the Holy Spirit.

[4:03] They didn't plan to visit other churches to raise support. They weren't told that they needed a certain amount of money to be financially secure and where they were going to serve the Lord.

Their local church would support them, not necessarily with a financial contract, but they were trusting the Lord's guidance and provision for them. And so here we have a church in Syria, a Gentiles church that sends out the first missionaries.

And they sent their leading men, Barnabas and Saul. Not someone who couldn't hold down a job, so he might as well be a missionary, something like that.

And so they sailed to Barnabas home turf, Cyprus, to begin their ministry. Verse 5. When they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews.

And they also had John as their helper. So they went to the synagogue first to search for God-fearing men with whom they could share about Jesus.

[5:08] How Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies for the Messiah. This was Paul's pattern. It's a great pattern. Somebody who, going to somebody who already knows something about the Bible.

But he's going to connect the Old Testament prophecies to the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul, as you know, always had a heart for his countrymen. They'd be one to the Lord Jesus. In fact, in Romans 9 he says, I'd be willing to go to hell if they could be saved.

If it were possible, well it wasn't possible. But he had, wow, had a big heart for his countrymen, the Jewish people. And so we have John Mark, future author of the Gospel of Mark, who comes along with him as an apprentice to carry their water.

Literally, he was an under-rower. A subordinate rower. And you've seen or heard of ships in the olden days where they'd have a bottom level where people were rowing on the bottom of the second level of the ship.

And that's what John was. Out of sight, but doing the work of the Lord. Trying to help them at this time. Thank the Lord for the under-rowers. Who aren't seen, but get the work done.

[6:18] I mean, thank the Lord for people who make sure the temperature's right in this building. Who get the coffee going. Who make sure the electronics are working. Who put out the snacks.

That's a pretty important thing for us believers, you know. The mid-morning snack. So thank the Lord for everybody who's behind the scenes doing what needs to be done. Verses 6-8.

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, who was with the procouncil Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence.

This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the magician, for so his name is translated, was opposing them, seeking to turn the procouncil away from the faith.

So they traveled from one end of Cyprus to the other, and opposition is noted. Surprise. Well, not so surprising. It's still going on in the world, isn't it?

[7:18] The opponent was a false prophet. He's referred to as the son of Jesus. Was this referring to the name Jesus of salvation? Was this referring to what they had heard about Jesus in Jerusalem?

Well, it turns out he was a son of Antichrist, or as later as he's referred to as the son of Satan. The local governor, he wanted to hear what the two missionaries had to share. However, the local Magi, that's the word, same as the Magi who followed the star.

He wanted the governor's attention for him, and sought to turn the governor away from the gospel. Verse 9. Verse 9. Verse 9.

But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him, and said, You are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all unrighteousness.

Will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? 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.

[8:25] So here we find Saul. That's his Hebrew name. Now we find, from now on we find his Greek name, Paul, being emphasized. And that will be with him for the rest of his life in the scriptures.

He has strong words for this sorcerer. And we might think, Paul, you're coming across kind of strong. And if so, it's because we're swamped with the notion that tolerance should rule.

You know, that's kind of what our culture emphasizes now. Tolerance. That is, you can blast Christianity as far as you want to, but you better be tolerant of every other religion and practice that's going on.

Well, Paul is speaking these powerful words as he's filled with the Spirit. He's filled with the Spirit when he says this. So we know what God thinks about opposition to those who are seeking to spread his word.

And we need to speak the truth in love. We, you know, we don't have to go on marches. We don't have to hold up placards, bigger placards in the opposition saying God hates whatever it may be.

[9:40] But we need to speak the truth in love and hold to the truth of God's word. And not give it up. Maybe there are times when we're silent because we don't think what we have to say will be received.

Well, may the Lord give us wisdom into when to speak and when to be quiet. Now, Paul knew from personal experience what it was to be blinded by the Lord and be without sight for a period of time. And that's what Elimus is going to experience. We don't know what led to his conversion, but it was part of Saul's, what happened at Saul's conversion. Verse 12, Then the procouncil believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord.

So the governor responds to the message that was supported by the miracle. And this is where miracles take those who are open to the truth. This was the Lord's plan behind his wonderful works. See my wonderful works. They're supporting the gospel message. It's much more important than what I'm doing. Problem is a lot of people just want to see the show. They want the miracles and they're not listening to the message.

[10:54] But we find when the end comes, there's going to be some miracles done. Not by the power of God, but what he allows Satan, the false prophet, the beast to accomplish.

And listen to the message. Listen to the Lord's message. That was the main purpose for his delivering the miracles. They supported what his wonderful words that he had.

Verse 13. Now, Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga and Pamphylia. But John left them and returned to Jerusalem.

And from this point on, Paul is the more prominent of the partners. We did have Barnabas and Saul. But now we have Paul and his party.

Or Paul and Barnabas from this point on in the rest of Acts. We also have John Mark departing from them. Maybe he didn't like that Paul was taking the lead over Uncle Barnabas.

[11:55] Maybe he was homesick. Maybe traveling conditions were too tough. After all, John came, apparently from a well-to-do family with a large house and a maid.

The believers, as you heard in your last chapter, met in his mother's house. So Mark might not have been used to the uncomfortable conditions that they're experiencing out on the field.

But we're glad you know the future for John Mark. He developed into a servant of the Lord and wrote the Gospel. The Gospel that many believers see emphasizing Jesus as the perfect servant of Jehovah.

And you know, in Paul's last letter, he called for John. He wanted John to come because he was a good servant and could be encouraging to Paul at that time. So don't, never think if you failed spiritually at some point in life, you're washed up for the rest of your spiritual life.

It doesn't have to be that way. John's an example for us of that. Verse 14. But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch. And on the Sabbath day, they went into the synagogue and sat down.

[13:08] After the reading of the law and the prophets, the synagogue officials sent to them saying, Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it. So here they arrive at this new location, another Antioch.

And they went to the synagogue. After an Old Testament reading, they were asked to preach if they had a word from God. And you went, how did two strangers get this opening?

And I don't know. I mean, you probably wouldn't invite somebody you didn't know. Hey, you know, we had somebody scheduled to speak. But if you want to come up and share something, give us what you got. You know, we, you know, so we're just not sure how this, how this happened.

Maybe they had clothes that identified them as, as brethren rabbis. Maybe they visited with him when they came in and, oh, well, you studied, you studied under Gamaliel in Jerusalem. Wow. And invited Paul especially to share something. We don't know. But they were invited and you knew Paul is not going to pass up this opportunity, right?

[14:19] I mean, that's, that's who he is. So, Paul stood up, verse 16, and motioning with his hands said, Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen.

The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt. And with an uplifted hand, he led them out from it.

For a period of about forty years, he put up with them in the wilderness. When he had observed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he distributed their land as an inheritance, all of which took about four hundred and fifty years.

And after these things, he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. Then they asked for a king and God gave them Saul, the son of Kish, a son of the tribe of Benjamin for forty years.

After he'd removed him, he raised up David to be their king. Concerning whom he also testified and said, I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after my heart who will do all my will.

[15:35] You know, that's a wonderful testimony of David. And sometimes we wonder, how is David a man after God's own heart? What made him a man after God's own heart?

Well, we know he loved to praise the Lord. The Lord is looking for, he inhabits our praises.

Remember the song by the Imperials, Praise the Lord?

And that phrase comes from Psalm 22, Our God inhabits praise. David wrote that psalm and many others. Some feel that maybe David is a man after God's own heart because he was quick to confess his sin.

Now we know he, okay, he delayed for, I don't know, nine months or so about his sin of adultery and murder. And yet when he was confronted with it, I have sinned.

And may that be the case for you and me. If we're confronted about our sin, may we not blame somebody else. May we not make excuses. May we own it and acknowledge it.

[16:39] And if we confess our sins, he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. That's referring to believers. Believers acknowledging their sin, agreeing with God concerning their sin, saying the same thing that God says about it.

And moving on back into fellowship with the Lord. Our relationship can't be broken as believers, but our fellowship can be broken. And you want to be in good fellowship with God.

The joyful, happy believer moving on for his sake and for his glory.

So, verse 23, for the descendants of this man, from the descendants of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a savior, Jesus.

After John had proclaimed before his coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. So, John, unlike any other prophet, announced the Messiah's arrival and it was imminent.

[17:53] It's here. He's here. And that's one reason maybe John is referred to as the greatest of all the prophets. He had the privilege of announcing the Messiah is here.

He's here now. Verse 26. Brethren, sons of Abraham's family and those among you who fear God. To us, the message of this salvation has been sent. For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, recognizing neither him nor the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning him.

And though they found no ground for putting him to death, they asked Pilate that he be executed. When they had carried out all those written concerning him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb.

And so from this history of Israel that Paul summarized, from David he skips a thousand years to Jesus.

[19:04] And he personalizes the message to Jews and God-fearing Gentiles, emphasizing that the Jews in general did not recognize Jesus as a Messiah when he walked among them.

They heard the Old Testament scripture every Sabbath, just like those who Paul was with at that very moment. Instead, without a good reason, they pushed Pilate to crucify him.

And they fulfilled what was prophesied about the Jews mistreating him. Where is that found in the Bible? Well, have you ever read Isaiah 53? Key chapter, greatest gospel chapter in the Old Testament.

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.

And like one from whom men hide their face, we did not esteem him. We esteemed him, we valued him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

[20:12] Psalm 22 is another portion where you read about the Messiah being so brutally mistreated. Psalm 22 includes the prophecy that he would die by crucifixion.

They pierced my hands and my feet. Now, there's no other way you can interpret that death than by crucifixion. I mean, you can get your hands poked, you can get your feet poked, but that's not going to kill you.

I mean, maybe if you get an infection or something like that, but no, that's speaking of crucifixion before it happened, a thousand years before it happened. It was prophesied by David concerning the Messiah.

Verse 30. Verse 30. But God raised him from the dead. And for many days he appeared to those who came with him from Galilee to Jerusalem.

Forty days. The very ones who are now his witnesses to this people. And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled this promise to our children, and that he raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm.

[21:33] You are my son. Today I have begotten you. As for the fact that he raised him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, he has spoken in this way.

I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David. Therefore, he also says in another Psalm, You will not allow your Holy One to undergo decay.

For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers, and underwent decay.

But he whom God raised did not undergo decay. So we find here, resurrection is proclaimed.

And we find that Paul's first recorded sermon here, in Acts, echoes Peter's first recorded sermon in Acts chapter 2. They both emphasized this verse from Psalm 16.

[22:37] And they say this does not refer to David, but it refers to the Christ. When it says, you will not allow your Holy One to see corruption. They both emphasize David's body's decayed.

His tomb's over there. Nobody's going to open it up to find out, but that's the way it is. Not so the body of Jesus Christ. So, if you're looking for an Old Testament prophecy of Christ's resurrection, here it is.

Peter used it. Paul used it. We should use it too, to emphasize the people. Yes, his resurrection was predicted ahead of time. Before he even came into the world.

So when you read in Psalm 2, You are my son, today I have begotten you. It's emphasized, this is referring to the resurrection. He was begotten, brought into this world as a baby.

And now he was brought back into this world through resurrection. I will give you the holy and sure mercies or blessings of David.

[23:42] That's an interesting expression. But we know that when the Lord Jesus had accomplished his work, he would not stay in the grave. He was raised from the dead.

God had mercy on David. He didn't give him the death penalty, which according to the Old Testament he would deserve for his certain sins, particular sins. But he forgave David based on the work that Jesus Christ would do in the future.

Just the same for you and for me. Verse 38 and 39. Therefore, let it be known to you, brethren, that through him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.

And through him everyone who believes is freed from all things from which you could not be freed through the law of Moses. And this describes what the Lord's wonderful death accomplished.

So great salvation. And we think of this forgiveness of sins proclaimed to the Gentiles, previously proclaimed to the Jews, proclaimed to the whole world.

[24:54] We think of the greatness of the death of Jesus Christ. You know, God could figure up a finite number of sins that took place on planet Earth throughout the history of mankind.

It's a number too big for me to figure, too big for you to figure, but it's not. God knows what those, that finite number is. God knows what those, that infinite person. God knows what those, that infinite person. And yet, the person who died on the cross is an infinite person.

So that if there were any number of worlds beyond planet Earth and sins beyond planet Earth, his payment could cover all of those sins as well.

Because he's an infinite person. Because he's an infinite person. Oh, the greatness of the death of the Lord Jesus. No event has ever happened. No greater work transaction happening than his death on the cross to pay for our sins to the pleasure of God.

God made the sacrifice. God was the sacrifice. God was the sacrifice. God received the sacrifice. A tremendous transaction between the Father and the Son with the Spirit of God involved.

[26:13] So great salvation. Verses 40 and 41. Therefore take heed so that the things spoken of in the prophets may not come upon you.

Behold you scoffers and marvel and perish. For I am accomplishing a work in your days. A work which you will never believe though someone should describe it to you.

How would you like a visiting preacher to lay this verse on you? It's a verse quoted from Habakkuk. It's from the Old Testament.

It's about God telling Habakkuk, I'm going to bring the Babylonians in to deal with Israel. You say Israel's a problem. Yeah, Israel's a problem. I'm going to bring the Babylonians. Oh, wait a minute. The Babylonians, they're worse off than the Israelites.

God says, no, this is my plan. You don't understand it. But this is my plan. Just receive it by faith. The just shall live by faith.

[27:16] It's also found in that portion in Habakkuk. So, there's a warning not to reject the gospel because there are consequences.

It's not just to take it or leave it. You know, everybody has their own way of thinking, their own belief, their own truth. We need to carefully do the same as we preach the gospel.

You can say, today's the day of salvation. You may not have tomorrow. Are you saved? Is everyone in this room saved? Have you personally trusted the Lord Jesus and Him alone for your salvation? Or are you still counting on something good that you can do? Your works will get you nowhere with God for salvation. Only the work of Christ satisfies Him. But I think this and other portions warn me. You know, sometimes somebody may get up and they may have a lot of correction delivered in their message. And you think, well, Merry Christmas to you too.

[28:21] And you know, it's, correction, it's, well, I want to be open to receiving it. Because there's some, I know I'm not there yet.

And you know you're not there yet. And so there's something there that God wants me to take. Even if the one who's delivering it is maybe kind of hard nosed and you may not appreciate the delivery.

I want to listen and respond and not miss out on what the Word of God says. Because these are the words, I mean, Paul just quoted something from the Lord Himself.

And he takes sin seriously and he takes, his desire for us to be holy ones before him is serious. And I want to, I want to respond and take him seriously as well.

Verse 42. As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath.

[29:20] Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God.

The next Sabbath, nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul and were blaspheming.

So we have the two opposing responses to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Some believe, some reject. But God's Word does not return to him empty.

We all appreciate that verse in Isaiah 55, 11. And yet, God's Word can soften the heart or God's Word can harden the heart.

Depending on the individual's response to the gospel that's being shared. But God's Word doesn't go away empty. And I hope you're one, I hope I'm one, when I hear God's Word that my heart is softened.

[30:34] And yes, I'm saved, but my heart can continue to be softened to receive God's Word. And not hardened to resist God's Word because maybe I'm holding on to something I shouldn't be holding on to before him.

And I know it, I just haven't dealt with it. Jealousy. It led to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. And now it leads to the persecution of believers. Still happening in our world today, isn't it?

46. 46. Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, It was necessary that the Word of God be spoken to you first, since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life.

Behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us. I have placed you as a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the end of the earth.

And as you know, this is the general pattern of Paul's experience through the missionary journeys. He offered the Gospel first to the Jews, typically going to the synagogues.

[31:35] Most rejected. But some believed, a few believed, and Gentiles, some of the Gentiles believed. We're still in the generation where more Gentiles than Jews are responding to the Gospel.

Even though initially, as you know, there are more Jews in Jerusalem, that's where the church started on the day of Pentecost. Think of this verse that Paul quoted in Isaiah.

I just want to read the whole verse. Isaiah 49, verse 6. He said, It is too small a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones in Israel. I will also make you a light for the nations, so that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth. The sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, it was too great a thing to be left just to the Jews alone.

It's gone to the whole world. Aren't you glad? Verse 48. When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord.

[32:47] And as many as had been appointed to eternal life, believed. Well, if you believe the Gospel, all I'm going to say is, you've been chosen for eternal life.

Verse 49. And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region. But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.

But they shook off the dust of their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. So here the disciples are pressing on in the joy of the Lord.

Amazing. Amidst continuous persecution. And all of us who are believers today in this room were so glad they did. Because eventually the Gospel made its way all over the world, across the ocean, so that you and I could trust in the Lord Jesus as our Savior.

Father, we thank you for your wonderful plan and the history of the church and Acts. We thank you for raising up Paul, converting him from a Christian terrorist to someone who was greatly used by you.

[34:02] The first missionary to the Gentiles in a sense. Father, we want to be those who appreciate the wonderful work that you do in lives, changing lives, your greatest miracle that you're doing today.

Father, help us to be those who value the Word of God, who appreciate the Gospel, and spread it. And spread it until the sure return of our Lord Jesus. Strengthen my brethren here, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.