

## A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES

Acts 13:1-52 (Key verse: 13:47)

*"For this is what the Lord has commanded us: 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'"*

Every person to a certain extent want to feel special, especially young people. In every task or work they are given there is always that sense to be unique or special. While young there is this strong sense that I am going to do something meaningful in this world, something of value. This could be through the career you want to embark on, or a community initiative you plan to start. My point is that somehow, we have a strong desire for our lives to mean something, and I think that is what drives why we study, why we work hard and so on. However, unfortunately many times what we deemed to be meaningful could result in being an empty jar. In today's passage God reveals something that gives great meaning and purpose, something that we can be 100% sure is meaningful because it came from God the author of meaning in this life. God set apart Paul and Barnabas for his work. This was so special and meaningful, these two men were set apart from the rest for a special task of God. Which later was revealed was to be a light for the gentiles and to bring salvation to the ends of the earth. May we learn through this passage what does it mean, firstly, to be set apart and secondly to be a light unto the gentiles. May the lord help us receive one clear word so we too can participate in this meaningful work of God. Amen!

From the previous passage we learned that the word of God had continued to increase and spread. We read in verse 1, that the Church at Antioch had prophets and teachers. This Church was also a praying and fasting Church [3]. Look at verse 2, **"While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'**" While they were in worship and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. The command or direction probably came through one of the prophets within the church as the Holy Spirit led. However, what does it mean to be set apart? Let look at verse 3, *"So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off."* They were sent off from the Antioch Church. We can see that being set apart means you can not remain in the way or place you have been living. We have to say No to some things and yes to something. By accepting the call of God, they were saying no to being at Antioch church. They were being removed from their comfort zone. Because at Antioch Church they were known and loved, they had good and beautiful fellowship with the brothers and sisters there, now by being set apart meant they had to go out and make new friends in the Lord and do the uncomfortable things. To actually to be a Christian means to be set apart. You are set apart from living like the world into living a life according to the word of God. You are being set apart to live a life of holiness from a life of indulgence in sin. God also chose the nation of Israel, he set them apart in order to use them as a nation through whom the savior of the world would be born. Paul and Barnabas are not being set apart from something that is bad to something that is good. In verse 1, Barnabas is listed as one of the teachers at the Church. Also from previous passages he was a great encouragement in the church. Yet still God, was setting him and Paul apart for His work. This was really special and graceful of God to give Paul and Barnabas a clear direction within their faith. This really shows that, in order to commit to a work of God will require one to be removed from other things, and those things won't necessarily be bad things. God wanted them to do the best thing and not just a good thing. If they continued to do the good and not say no in serving the Antioch Church they could not do the best thing. God was setting them apart. I think its similar to when a student has exams season, they would then set themselves apart to focus on studies and then cut off other activities they may have been involved with. Those activities being cut may be good activities, however they know in order to make an impact I their exams marks they need to set apart themselves apart. They may have to cut themselves from hanging out with friends and so forth as an example. However, in this case it is God who was setting Paul and Barnabas apart for his work, and this meant they had to remove themselves from the Antioch Church in order to commit to the new task the Lord was giving them.

We read from verse 4-5, that they went on their journey and arrived at Salamis and there they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. Look at verse 6, *"They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus"* The city of Paphos was well known for its immorality and its worship of Venus, the goddess of sexual love. There was also a Jewish sorcerer and a false prophet by the name, Bar-Jesus which actually means the "son of Jesus". So this place was really dark, clouded by immorality, a man whom people could have possibly confused to actually be the son of Jesus but was actually a false prophet. Being called a false a prophet means he used to blaspheme the name of God, because that's what a false prophet essentially does. He even indulged in sorcery which is some form of magic. Its interesting that he is Jew, practices magic and is a false prophet. What a combination, just goes to show how spiritually dark this city was. But this Bar-Jesus was also called Elymas and was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. A proconsul is a governor or military commander of an ancient Roman province. We read in verse 7 that he was an intelligent man and actually

sent for Barnabas and Paul because he wanted to hear the word of God. He might have heard about them since they had traveled through the whole island proclaiming the word of God.

As the proconsul called on Paul and Barnabas to hear God's word, we read in verse 8 that, ***Elymas the sorcerer opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith.*** Clearly revealing his enmity for the work of God and the darkness he lived in. However, Paul had a response for him, look at verse 9-11, *"Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, 10'You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? 11Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun."* Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand". Paul was Saul's roman name and he decreed God's judgement upon the Elymas. Paul did not beat about the bush, he revealed clearly to Elymas his sin of deceit and trickery. He was perverting the right ways of the Lord. That is why he was a false prophet, he contributed to the spiritual darkness of the city. In fact he was probably benefiting financially from deceiving the proconsul with his magic. And was now worried that Paul and Barnabas were going to take away his business opportunity. However, because of that, he had become a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right. The Proconsul was developing some faith and wanted to hear more but Elymas was trying to turn him away from the faith. He was made blind unable to see the light of the sun as a symbol of the life of darkness he was living.

Look at verse 12, *"When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord"*. Notice that he did not believe because of the eventful situation of Elymas, but rather, he believed because he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord. Paul and Barnabas were effective in the work the Lord had called them into. They had cast out the darkness that was in the city and within the proconsul. The darkness of magic and sorcery did not have power over the word of God. No matter how immoral and dark the island was, when the men who were set apart for the work of God came, filled with the Holy Spirit, they could cast light, bring deliverance and salvation to the proconsul.

Paul and his companions then left Paphos and reached Pisidian Antioch, note that it was not same Antioch where the Christian church was planted. Verse 14-15 tell us that, *on the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. 15After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak."* Paul took full advantage of the call. He took this opportunity to reveal who Jesus was from the History of Israel. Firstly from verse 17-20, Paul shows how from the time of captivity in Egypt the Lord made Israel prosper and how he led them free from Egypt to the promised land through his mighty power. God overthrew seven nations in Canaan and gave their land to his people as their inheritance. All this took about 450 years. While Israel lived conquered land, to resolve issues within the nation, the Lord appointed judges for them until the time of Samuel the prophet. Secondly, from verse 21-23, God raised a king through whose descendants God brought to Israel the savior Jesus. The people asked for a king. All along the Lord ruled Israel as their king but now they wanted a human king and the Lord gave them Saul. However, Saul sinned before God and did his own thing instead of doing as the Lord had commanded him. And so the Lord raised David as a new king, David became a man after God's own heart and did everything the Lord wanted him to do. It was from David through whom God brought to Israel the Savior Jesus as God promised. Paul showed through the old testament (Torah) and their forefather David how the promise of God had been fulfilled through the person of Jesus Christ. That it was through king David, that the promise of the Messiah would be fulfilled. Thirdly, from verse 24-25, Paul uses recent times, John the Baptist, to show that Jesus is the Messiah. That before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance of sin. That as he was completing his work he said, who do you think I am? I am not that one. No, but he is coming after me, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. Through this history Paul showed that for both Jews and God-fearing gentiles, that the message of salvation was sent to all people. Fourthly, from verse 27-31, how the people of Jerusalem and the rulers rejected Jesus. How they ended up killing him after carrying out all that was written about him. How they took him to tomb but on the third day, God raised him from the dead. And how for many days he was even seen by those who had traveled with him. That is why they are now witnesses of Jesus Christ to the Jews. Paul and Barnabas were sharing the good news, that Jesus is the Messiah who is the very person God promised their fathers.

Paul showed through Psalms of David that in verse 35, when God spoke to David, *"you will not let your holy one see decay."* Though this promise was made to David it was actually made to his descendant Jesus Christ. Because after David had served his purpose in his own generation he fell asleep, was buried and his body decayed. However, because Jesus was raised from the dead, his body did not see decay. Paul arrives at the climax of his message in verses 38-39, ***Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. 39Through him everyone who believes is set free***

**from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses”.** Jesus is the promised Masiah, through Jesus forgiveness of sins is proclaimed. This is because all our sin was placed on Jesus as though he was the one who had committed sin, and this made him face God’s wrath and judgement. He died because of our sin that he took upon himself as though he was a sinner. However, God raised him from the dead indicating that our sin was wiped out. For in a way, when Jesus died because of sin we died with him. His resurrection from the dead gives those who believe in Jesus hope that they too will be raised from the dead. Jesus made peace between us and God and it is through living by faith in him that we gain righteousness and this peace with God. That sin no longer has a hold on us, and it is all because placing our faith in the finished work of Jesus.

That is also why Paul says, everyone who believes in him is set free from every sin, a justification that could not be achieved through obeying the law of Moses. The Jews had traditionally lived under the law of Moses, they depended on obeying the law of Moses for salvation or righteousness with God. However no good work can clear our sin from God, it is only through faith in Jesus that we can obtain salvation from God. And this is the amazing grace of God for the Jews and the God fearing Gentiles. If we try to depend on anything else including the law of Moses for salvation, we would then be rejecting the grace of God that was shown through Jesus Christ. So in this way, everyone who believes whether Jew or Gentile, slave, master, CEO, student, professor and so on, through Jesus Christ they can receive salvation. Hallelujah!

In verse 42-43, we read that, as Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. And many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas and **the disciples urged them to continue in the grace of God.** Instead of depending on the law of Moses, they should now repent and believe on Jesus Christ for it is by that faith that they would participate in the grace of God for salvation. However, on the next Sabbath something unexpected happened.

Almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. This was an amazing work of God, imagine the whole of Johannesburg gathered to hear the word of the Lord, would not that be a site. Look at verse 45, *“When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. They began to contradict what Paul was saying and heaped abuse on him.”* Actually these are the very Jews who showed excitement to come next Sabbath to hear more from Paul and Saul. Because they are now trying to contradict what they had heard the previous week. They grew jealous when they saw almost the whole city wanted to hear more about Jesus. They did not remain in the grace of God as Paul had encouraged them, rather they still went back to relying in works for maintaining salvation with God. Look at verse 46, *“Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “We had to speak the word of God to you first. **Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.**”* The Jews had passed judgement upon themselves, by rejecting the word of God, by rejecting Jesus Christ, they considered themselves unworthy of eternal life. This is their very own judgement upon themselves.

It is like someone who claims to know classic music well and then when Amadeus Mozart or Ludwig van Beethoven is played they say that music is not good or well written. They would have brought judgement upon themselves, that it is them who are under trial and not Mozart or Beethoven. Mozart and Beethoven have been among men who are a definition of what classic music is since centuries. God was pleased with Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ declared that he did only what he saw His father do. However, those then who reject Jesus, reject God and God’s salvation. They place themselves under trial and not Jesus. Jesus faced God’s trial because of our sin, was judged, died and on the third day rose from the dead. He is now seated at the right hand side of God to rule in God’s coming kingdom. Those who reject him bring judgement upon themselves and therefore count themselves unworthy of eternal life. Because the Jews were rejecting the gospel, the good news. Paul would now turn to the Gentiles.

Let us all read verse 47, **“For this is what the Lord has commanded us: “ ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’”** This was a prophecy from the book of Isaiah 49:6. Let’s start by looking at who is the light. It is Jesus Christ, remember even when Simeon filled with the Holy Spirit, when he saw the baby Jesus at the temple said, *“...30For my eyes have seen your salvation, 31which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: 32**a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.**”* Now Jesus disciples will be witnesses of Jesus and thus be the light for the Gentiles. That is why the heart of Paul’s message in this passage was centered on Jesus Christ. Because the apostles had received Jesus as their lord and savior they could be used as the light for the gentiles. God could set them apart to be a light for the gentiles. When the Gentiles heard this they were glad and honored the word of the Lord, and all those appointed for eternal life believed. God’s word spread throughout the region but the Jews incited the God fearing women of high standing. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them from their region. This was the manifestation of choosing a life of darkness rather than light. Many times we expect that if you bring light to some people there would be peace. However, the

disciples experienced persecution and rejection because they were set apart for the work of God. Initially when we heard that the almost the whole city had come to hear the word of God we were happy.

We desire to see repentance and peace in our cities, we desire for the church of God or the teachings of the bible to operate without persecutions. However, we should remember that Jesus himself, the light of the world was persecuted and killed for being the light. How about his servants. That is why usually in your family, if your family is not Christian and actually even when they are proclaimed Christian, once you become a born again Christian persecution begins. All of a sudden you become a rebellious child. This is because the Christian faith, first and foremost sets you apart from the fallen ways of the world. Jesus did say in Matthew 10:34, *"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword"*. Not that we go around looking for trouble or suffering, not at all. But by virtue of being born again of having Jesus in your life as your Lord and savior, that sets you apart from darkness because you would have the light of God, Jesus Christ. And since no body light a lamp to place it under the bed, your light starts illuminating and there is the tension between the darkness and light. You will feel this tension, will loose some friends, will be labeled with names, being disowned by family members, not participating in certain family activities. And I repeat this will not be because you wat to cause tension with your family or others, but it would be a result of being in the light of Jesus. Because of Jesus as your lord and savior, you would somehow share the truth of God, you become a light for the Gentiles. Gentiles are those without a history of God like the Jews. Most part of the world is like that, however God has been using believers to be a light unto the Gentiles. God's salvation history has been reveal through the scriptures. By accepting Jesus by faith for salvation, who clears us from the guilt and power of sin, we become part of God's salvation history.

In conclusion, being a Christian who believes In Jesus as Lord and savior of your life means by the grace of God, you have been be set apart from the world. It means you have the light of God who is Jesus Christ. Jesus has left us a commission, to go make disciples of all nations. This is a call to be a light for the Gentiles. Like Paul and Barnabas all they did was to share Jesus Christ, that it is through him that forgiveness of sin is made possible, it is through Jesus that we are saved. And this is the grace of God, that we do not need to depend on our works for salvation or even to maintain our salvation. Because there are people who start right, depending on Jesus for salvation but then afterwards depend on good works to maintain their salvation. This is wrong and a rejection of Jesus, such a person has called judgement upon themselves and they count themselves unworthy of eternal life. We either live our lives separate from God without His knowledge or we live our life with God's Holy Spirit inside. That is a life that comes with a cost, a life that will shake things up in your life, a life that will remove you from your comfort zone. Where you don't just do things with friends because its nice. That's is why we have been spending our Saturdays on learnin what is a biblical view of dating and marriage. Are we influenced by the world or are we influencing the world with the light of Jesus? Being a light unto the gentiles is a testimony to the world that Jesus is alive and that salvation is received through no one else but Jesus. I pray that we may respond to God's grace and participate in being the light unto the Gentiles. Amen!