

MONDAY 01 August 2022 "Elymas Blinded" (Acts 13:7-12)

Good Monday morning to you my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

Competition is something found in every society in the world. There is some degree of competitive nature that rises up in almost everyone, especially boys, from the time we are very young. Sports is the arena where this competitive nature is particularly celebrated, but it can be found in education or business or politics or even romance can't it? In fact, do you see competition between religions in seeking to attract faithful converts? That is another way in which Biblical Christianity is different from 'religions'.

In Christianity Almighty God is appealing to the human race which He has created in His image. That appeal of God is NOT to a religious system or specific religious rituals or traditions but rather God is inviting you and me into a RELATIONSHIP of Love with Him! John 3:16, one of many verses in the Bible explaining this invitation says **"For God SO LOVED the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but will have eternal life..."**

We are traveling these days with Barnabas and Saul and their young friend John Mark. Their adventurous trip has just begun. They left Antioch, Syria, going first to the coast and then by ship to Cyprus Island, Barnabas' home. They've been proclaiming the wonderful news of Jesus and the remarkable details of this invitation from God into a love relationship with Him made possible by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Word has reached Mr. Sergius Paulus, the proconsul of the Island and he has sent an invitation to Barnabas and Saul to come and meet with him. They are anxious and understandably so. In almost every city where the story of Jesus has been proclaimed, opposition has arisen, especially from Jewish leaders, and persecution has broken out against followers of Jesus.

But the proconsul is not looking to stop or punish Barnabas and Saul, he wants to hear their message. More than that the record says: **"The proconsul was an intelligent man and he sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God."** (Acts 13:7) *The Holy Spirit of God was working on Cyprus Island, in the hearts and minds of many people who had a hunger for truth! But the devil was also working on Cyprus Island.* The proconsul had an employee, his attendant named Elymas, who is described as **"...a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet..."** We discussed the dangers of this man yesterday and I called you to recognize the unseen spiritual battle raging on Cyprus Island. No tanks or guns or bullets, but schemes and weapons and powerful forces unseen by human eyes but very, very real evil spirits and the Holy Spirit were battling. And the target? The very heart and mind of Mr. Sergius Paulus who had the authority to either arrest and silence Barnabas and Saul or give them permission to continue and perhaps even provide support and affirmation to their cause! Can you see the implications of the outcome of this battle?

The record helps us see the unseen strategies: ***"But Elymas the sorcerer opposed Barnabas and Saul and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith [in God]. Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, '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?'"*** (Acts 13:9,10)

The battle lines are drawn, the enemy has been boldly identified and his schemes and tactics of deceit and distortion have been called out! Look at Mr. Sergius Paulus the proconsul, stunned with his eyes wide, his forehead furrowed. *A bold accusation has been made about his attendant being in league with the devil and an opponent to all that is right!* If true, the proconsul cannot afford such a man having influence in his office or his life. If false, Barnabas and Saul should be arrested for such outrageous claims against an advisor and attendant of the proconsul. *But how would the proconsul know the truth?* Which side should he believe? For a moment all eyes are on Mr. Sergius Paulus, and he wishes he had the wisdom of Solomon. Silence hangs in the room.

Did you notice something else very significant in that brief record of this moment? Listen to this statement: ***"Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit..."*** (Acts 13:9) It's only six little words and you might have missed it... ***'Saul who was also called Paul'!!!*** History has suddenly changed. In six little words, with no explanation as to why or how, the New Testament record takes a 90 degree turn. *One of the most famous men in the entire Bible, in all of Christianity history has a name change, and Luke, the author of Acts, seems to almost mention it simply in passing!* Many people believe Saul's full name was Saul Paulus the Pharisee from Tarsus, and here on Cyprus Island, as Saul is launching his new, God given life purpose, it appears Saul believes it will be more effective for him to be known by the name Paulus or Paul, rather than Saul. Saul, of course, was a highly esteemed Hebrew name. The first king of Israel, a man selected by God Himself, was named Saul. Every Jewish family who ever named their boys Saul likely had hopes and dreams of their son becoming a significant leader among the Jewish people, maybe even a historical figure in the history of Israel.

But Saul's encounter with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus, and his message of commissioning from Jesus, pronounced to him in his blindness in Damascus by Ananias the Jesus follower, was clear... *Saul's life purpose was n longer to be a great Jewish Pharisee, nor a political leader in Israel's politics, Saul was to be a primary spokesman of the Gospel of Jesus to GENTILES and their Kings!* According to Acts 9:15. Now, standing before Sergius Paulus, the proconsul of Cyprus Island, confronting the deception, the evil, the opposition to all that is right, in Elymas... Saul Paulus evidently takes on a version of his latter name, "**Paulus**", a name both he and Sergius share, to engage a powerful battle of truth, integrity and authority!

After his very bold and powerful accusation against Elymas the sorcerer attendant of the proconsul, Saul Paulus the apostle of Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit of God, unleashed some of the Holy power of God entrusted to him by the Holy Spirit with these words: **"Now the hand of the LORD is against you, Elymas. You are going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun."** (Acts 13:11) Paul is pointing right at Elymas with an angry look on his face. *He knows the devil himself is behind the deceptive power of Elymas and this evil must be stopped!* Elymas is stunned. At first a proud, confident, defiant look is on his face as he scowls back at Paul.

The proconsul is watching very carefully, his eyes darting back and forth between Elymas and Paul, waiting to see... will anything happen here or is it all simply a battle of words? But wait... Elymas is rubbing his eyes, and starting to scream... **"I'm going blind, I can't see, I can't see! Help me everything is going dark; I can't see anything... I'm blind! O God, help me!"** Elymas falls to his knees frightened beyond description, the room has gone black for him...not even a hint of light. Everyone in the room backs away from Barnabas and Saul! What is this mighty power they have just unleashed on Elymas? If they can blind a man's eyes with only words, what else can they do with this power? Elymas cries out for someone to help him. He's fearful of moving because he cannot see anything!

Sergius Paulus is stunned. The record says: **"When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord."** (Acts 13:12) I presume this means the proconsul asked Barnabas and Saul to explain the Gospel message they had been proclaiming on Cyprus Island, and especially this great power of God that had been displayed in his presence. *At some point in their explanation, the proconsul declared his belief that their message was true, the Gospel of Jesus was God's truth and he wanted to enter into a relationship with God by trusting his life to Jesus!* A great spiritual battle was won that day. The devil was defeated in spectacular fashion as the sorcerer was blinded and the Gospel message of Jesus Christ was affirmed as true, and the saving power of Jesus was publicly displayed in the life of the proconsul Sergius Paulus!

We have no record of what else was said that day, *but from that day forward Saul the Pharisee was known as Paul the Holy Spirit filled and commissioned apostle of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles.* The Gospel rooted deeply on the Island of Cyprus and Barnabas, Paul and John Mark prepared to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit to the next city where the Holy Spirit wanted to penetrate the darkness of evil and promote the power of the living Jesus Christ! Tomorrow, we'll join them as the journey continues. For today, let's simply rejoice in the devil defeating, victorious power of Jesus displayed on Cyprus Island, and here's a song that brings this powerful event into your city and mine today:

Today's Scripture is Acts 13:7-12.