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Power in Paphos

Text: Acts 13:4-12

Verse 2 tells us that Paul and Barnabas were commissioned by the Holy Spirt AND by the church in Antioch. Just in case we’ve forgotten that very important piece, Luke reminds us in verse 4: these are **sent servants**. These are people whom God has called and upon whom God has laid hands, through the sending faith community. I believe in the organized institution called, The Church. Yes, it has its problems. It has its hypocrisy, but it is still the only entity/organism called by God to transform culture and the world.

Paul and Barnabas and John arrive in Salamis, on the island of Cyprus. This makes sense as a first stop since Cyprus was the home of Barnabas (Acts 4:36). They preached the word of God and then go to a section of the island called Paphos. From Salamis to Paphos is a journey of about 90 mules, going from Cyprus’ east coast to Cyprus’ west coast. In Paphos they meet Bar-Jesus. A political leader, Sergius Paulus, wants to hear Paul’s and Barnabas’ proclamations and the sorcerer (court wizard) is trying to block him. Paul calls the sorcerer out. He calls Bar-Jesus (Elymas) a son of the devil (John 8:44) and an enemy of all righteousness. Ironically, Bar-Jesus means “son of salvation”. In both the OT and NT there are accounts of demonic activity. Most of these are in the gospels. Two exceptions are the distressing spirit from the Lord that troubled Saul (1 Samuel 16:14ff) and the slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination (Acts 16:16ff). Sometimes demons possess a person, control a person, or trouble a person. There are five demonic control/possession narratives in the gospels.

1. The Gadarene region demon-possessed man (Mark 5:1ff)
2. The unclean spirit narrative in Mark 1:23ff
3. The demon-possessed blind and mute man in Matthew 12:22ff
4. The daughter of the woman of Canaan in Matthew 15:22ff
5. The demon-possessed epileptic, mute boy in Mark 9:17ff

I want to suggest two marks of Paul’s prophetic power in Paphos. He had a significant ministry there, owing to two realities.

1. He was Spirit-sent and Spirit-filled and Spirit-led (vs. 2, 4, 9; 16:6)

The touch of the Holy Spirit on the servant’s life makes all the difference. Acts 1:8 has Jesus saying, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you”. That is, the endowment, the enablement for ministry comes from the Spirit, not from ourselves. The Holy Spirit enters us upon our conversion and the Spirit uses us, in a good way, as instruments of ministry. On our recent trip to Greece (July 2021), I saw the places of ministry in which Paul found himself. Some cities were antagonistic toward the gospel. Yet, Paul preached and taught and reasoned in the synagogues aiming to persuade lost people. This is only possible when the Holy Spirit is at work... and *we* work with the Spirit.

1. Secondly, Paul was powerful and effective in his ministry in Paphos because he was unafraid to confront the demonic. We need not be afraid of the darkness. We are the people of the light, representing Jesus, the Light of the World. Note the confidence with which Paul confronts the false prophet. He stares at him(9b). He’s not afraid to look on him. The sorcerer is intent on turning the political leader away from the pursuit of truth (v.8). Paul is intent on proclaiming Jesus. Paul is not arrogant. He is hearing from God. When we walk with The Eternal, we hear what others don’t hear and we have insight that others don’t have.

There is an illustration of this in Matthew 16:16-17

*Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus answered and said, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven...”*

Peter had insights that came from above and insight that not everyone had. Sometimes the Church is fearful when it comes to confrontation. Part of Jesus’ commission to His disciples is the taking on of the devil’s work.

 Mark 16:17(NKJV)

 *And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out*

 *demons...*

Luke 10:17 (NKJV)

 17 *Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.”*

19 “Behold I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy...

**Illus.**

The Late R.C. Sproul (1939-2017) wrote:

*Fear of demons and evil spirits appears in every culture and with good reason. After all, demons are supernatural creatures and thus when it comes to sheer strength, these evil beings are vastly more powerful than even the strongest human being. Consequently, we find it easy to understand why people around the world have developed all manner of superstitions that they think will help them break free of the devil’s influence. They know they are not strong enough to stop the devil themselves, so they come up with other means of countering the influence of evil spirits.[[1]](#footnote-2)*

Paul is neither afraid not superstitious. In fact, he’s authoritative.

This is Paul on his first missionary journey. There on the Greek island of Cyprus, he calls the sorcerer out and tells him that he is to be stricken blind. It happens (v.11).

If we listen to, and obey, the voice of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit will do the same for us. We speak against the demonic, and God by His Spirit, will change the scenario. Devils bow. Wizards are blinded. Legions of devils cascade down into the sea.

What does this narrative have to do with me and you? Anything?

Yes.

Whether we are on a Greek island or not, let us make two commitments.

1. Let us all rely on the Holy Spirit for our ministry credentials. What makes us effective is not that we graduated from a Christ-centered college or seminary or that we are in a progressive denomination or that we have moved to the non-denominational Bible church or that we traveled to the Holy land or that we attended a dynamic conference on holiness. No, what makes us useful ministry is that we are Spirit-filled... and Spirit-led... and Spirit-inspired... and Spirit-compliant!
2. Taking our cue from this passage, let us also go forward not backing down from a setting in which the devil is clearly at work. Let us confront the demonic, in the name of Jesus.

Amen

1. [ligonier.org](http://ligonier.org). Jesus Confronts Legion. April 4, 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)