



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Great Lion of God, Acts 11:27-30

“From Antioch to the World”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Well it seems like a very long time since we had a look at the life of the Apostle Paul, but if you remember in our concluding study about a month ago, we were looking at the apostle’s ministry in the city of Antioch. He had been recalled to the city by Barnabas. And in Acts chapter 11 and verse 26, we had read and commented upon the statement that is made there. “And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.”

It’s rather interesting that the name Christian came to be given to the believers in Antioch, and one naturally asks the question, “Who gave them the name Christian?” Well it could hardly have been the Jews. The children of Abraham preferred terms of contempt when they spoke about Christians. They spoke of them as the sect of the Nazarenes, and one thinks of the ideas that were going around in their minds with reference to Nazareth. “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” Nathaniel is reported to have said. And so it seems rather plain that this term “Christian” must not have come from the Jews. They would not also have wanted to associate the believers with the

Messiah, and that term “Christian” means “one who is related to the Christ,” or “one who is related to the Messiah.”

So, it was hardly the Jews who gave the early believers in Antioch the name Christians. And it also was hardly the Christians who attached that name to themselves because when one reads through the New Testament, they use other names primarily. They speak of themselves as brethren or disciples or believers or saints. The word occurs only two times in the New Testament right here and then in 1 Peter chapter 4 and verse 16. And in both of these cases the implication is made, or seems to be found, in the context that it was a name given to the believers by other than believers, and so it was not the Jews, and it was not the believers themselves, then it was probably the Gentiles; that is, the unbelievers in the city of Antioch who gave them the name Christians. They apparently began to see that this movement was different from the Jewish movement or the religious position of the Jews. And so evidently the Gentiles gave them the name to distinguish them from the Jews.

The term itself is a term derived from the term Christ in a Latin way so that it is a Latin derivative from the Greek term *Christos*. And we know that the people in Antioch were famous for the invention of terms in ridicule and derision. And it's likely that this arose in that way. That is, they were Christians, and the term itself was a term of derision. They were followers of this person they kept talking about and calling Christ. Now of course the term itself, ultimately, became a term of glory, but later on after the time that we're reading about here. So, when we read then that, “The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch,” it probably means that they were subject to a great deal of ridicule, and this is a term of ridicule. Now, when we use the term “Christian,” we use it as a term of signifying relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ and relationship to those who confess our Lord. So it's a nice term now, but in its earliest days, it was not.

Antioch, we mentioned in one of the earlier studies, becomes now the center of Christianity. It was beautifully situated on the Orontes River. It was a kind of gate to the

east. An oriental Rome, it has been called with many Jews, many Greeks, and many Romans in the city. There's a curiously prophetic story about the founding of the city, about birds that landed in certain places as a result of individuals seeking guidance from birds, and one bird landing on Seleucia, which is the port of Antioch, and another in Antioch. It's almost as if the city had a particularly providential origin, but it was settled in a very important place and became a kind of gate to the east, as well as the headquarters of Rome in the east as well. It was a city of frivolous amusement. It was characterized by party quarrels. It was characterized particularly by superstition, a great deal of astrology. Incidentally, in those days they were even interested in horoscopes, and so there is an association with Antioch of horoscopes. In other words, it was a sanctuary for a kind of perpetual festival of vice. It's not surprising then, in the light of that, that the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ should find its way to Antioch and to think that the apostle came there and for one whole year taught the people of Antioch is certainly a very interesting thing.

Now, I want to read beginning at verse 27 through verse 30 of Acts chapter 11, and we'll talk first about Paul's second visit to Jerusalem and the events that precede it, and then we'll look at the choice of Paul and Barnabas for Gentile ministry in chapter 13. So in Acts chapter 11, we read in verse 27,

“And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.”

This is really a lovely picture of an apostolic church. You'll notice that the ministry of the church was not in the hands of one man as the pastor. We have here Paul and Barnabas, we know were there teaching. And we read also that prophets came, and the prophets who came from Jerusalem had the freedom to stand up in their meetings and to give their prophecies, and so, evidently, in the church at Antioch there was a freedom for individuals to rise in the midst of the meeting and give teaching and to give prophecies. And so the idea of a controlled ministry was evidently something that did not obtain at Antioch. As you well know, one of the reasons that Believers Chapel started was the desire of the elders to be sure to have just such a meeting once a week, and that's why every Sunday night the Lord's supper is observed in a meeting in which there is freedom for the teachers to teach, and if there were such things as prophets today for prophets to prophesy.

Now, there stood up in the midst of this meeting Agabus, and he signified by the spirit that there should be a famine, and Luke says the famine came to pass. That, of course, is to be expected if the man is a biblical prophet. The things that he says will come to pass. Reference is made, in another place in Acts, to the prophecies of Agabus, and so he evidently was a well known figure. And his prophetic percentage was one hundred percent so far as we know. That's quite a bit different from those who claim the gift of prophesy today, certainly was able to do a whole lot better than Jean Dixon and some of the others who attempt to give prophecies.

Notice also the giving, we have gifted ministry and freedom with fruit and giving according to their abilities. Notice the 29th verse, “Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea.” In other words, the principle that governed their giving was not the principle of the tithe but simply the principle of giving according to one's ability. Well, that's the New Testament principle, one of the New Testament principles. In 2 Corinthians chapter 8 and verse 12, the apostle writes in the 1st of his chapters on giving, “For if there be first a

willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.” So giving was voluntary giving.

This church was characterized also by faith. “And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord,” Luke writes in verse 21, so, characteristic is faith. There is also the characteristic of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, verse 23, “Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God.” So the products of the ministry of the grace of God were seen by Barnabas when he came there. And further it was a church in which there was a great deal of witnessing. Notice in the 19th verse,

“Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. (Verse 20) And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the LORD Jesus. (And verse 23) Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.”

And, of course, verse 26 in which we have evidence of the teaching of the apostles and others calling them first Christians in Antioch. So, it was a church in which there was freedom for ministry, freedom for prophesy, and it was characterized by the evident working of the Holy Spirit in their midst and a great desire to see the word go out. It's not surprising that we read then in verse 21, “The hand of the Lord was with them.”

So far as we can tell also they had no creed but the Scriptures. They had no constitution, no church constitution. They had no membership role. There was a common sense of the union with Christ and the common sense of union with one another, which, to my mind, is far more important than any such thing as a church role. They knew who the members of the church were because of the fact that the members

were members who were characterized by faith and a liveliness of testimony and a liveliness of service and activity in the local church. So there was no question about who is a member. They knew who the members were by the very fact that those members were practicing members. It always seems to me rather sad and also a token of the spiritual condition of a group that they have to get together and decide who is a member and who is not a member. So the very fact that they met together and they had a liveliness of relationship to the Lord Jesus, they felt deeply their union with him and their union with one another. They knew who belonged to that church, and to my mind, that's the ideal of a local church, of vital members who are assured of their vital union with our Lord and of their vital union with one another. I rather like picture of the church at Antioch, and it's no wonder that it became the kind of center of Christianity when the mission of Christianity began to go out to the Gentiles. “Determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea,” because they sensed their union with them and their responsibility to them, and Luke says, “Which also they did and sent it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and by the hand of Saul.”

This is the second visit of Paul to Jerusalem. Not much is made over it, but probably this is the reference that Paul makes in Galatians chapter 2, and so I'd like to turn over there, just for a moment, and read these verses. Sometimes these verses in Galatians 2 have been linked with Acts chapter 15, but it's more likely that they are to be related to this. We read in Galatians 2 verse 1,

“Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also. And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain. But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have

in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.”

That, by the way, is an interesting sidelight on the apostle's concern for biblical doctrine, and later on, we will see an incident in the island of Cyprus in which this is stressed again. But anything that compromised the gospel for the apostle was very serious and the idea that Titus had to be circumcised in order to be saved was enough to make Paul say, “No,” he will not be circumcised; even though he may say Timothy can be circumcised because the gospel was not an issue in that case. So, that's likely when those events happened, when Paul and Barnabas went up the 2nd time to the city of Jerusalem.

Well, let's turn now to the choice of Paul and Barnabas for Gentile ministry, intervening is Acts chapter 12 which has to do with some ministry that Peter had, but we turn over now to Acts chapter 13, and Paul is still in Antioch, and Barnabas is there as well. And we notice, further, that other people are there also. Let's read verse 1 through verse 4 of Acts chapter 13. I'll read, and you follow along in your text. “Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul.” So, here we have five who are there, prophets and teachers in the city of Antioch. And again, notice that so far as we can tell there is no reference to any pastor of the church in Antioch. There are prophets and teachers there. There is a freedom of ministry, no one man ministry. In fact there is the ministry by at least the five men here and probably of others as well, although they may not be mentioned.

Acts chapter 13 is the kind of continental divide of the Book of Acts because now Paul, not Peter, becomes the prominent character. Antioch, not Jerusalem, becomes the prominent city, and the world, not Palestine, comes to be emphasized by Luke as he sets out the ministry and progress of the gospel. In fact, Antioch is a kind of model church,

and I wonder if maybe Luke has not given us unusual details about Antioch because he considers this something a model church, the kind of church around which we might build the idea of a New Testament church. It seems to me that this is the safest way to build our ideas of what the New Testament church ought to be. Here is the church at Antioch, the leading church in the Pauline period of the life of the church, a model church.

Whenever I think of that I always think of the husband who was told at church one day by his wife, she was speaking with someone else, and she was speaking about him, and she said, “Well my husband is a model husband.” And he had never thought of himself really being a model husband, and he wasn’t quite sure the meaning of the word. And so, he went home and looked it up in the dictionary and under model he read, “Small imitation of the real thing.” [Laughter] There are lots of models along that line, I guess.

But this model church is a model New Testament church. Now, as I say, there was not pastor there. There were pastor teachers evidently in the church, but no pastor teachers over the church, prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon, Niger, Lucius, and Saul. And Saul, incidentally, is listed as last, not probably in importance, but nevertheless he is listed last.

Now we read in verse 2, “As they ministered to the Lord.” That word “ministered,” incidentally, is a word that is used of priestly ministry, and so while the details are not spelled out, later study of the New Testament and the ministry of the churches would seem to suggest that all of this happened in the context of their meetings in which they observed the Lord’s supper, and furthermore, in meetings in which the men felt free as priests to rise and participate in the meeting. And the fact that this term was a term that was used of the priestly ministry of the Old Testament is very fitting. So they were meeting in their regular meetings, and the meetings were being carried on as the meetings then evidently were carried on. They observed the Lord’s supper. They read passages



from the word of God. They gave revelation. They gave teaching. They gave thanks. And while this ministry was going on, and while they were fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.”

Now, notice that when this work of the apostle and Barnabas is set out here, it is set out as the product of the choosing of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who said, “Separate me,” Paul and Barnabas. The church separated them, but it is the Holy Spirit who directed them to separate Barnabas and Saul. And so the work of Paul and Barnabas has its origin in the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And he gives directions to the church. The Holy Spirit said, “Separate me Barnabas and Saul.”

One reading this might ask the question, “Well, how did the Holy Spirit speak? Was there just suddenly a voice that came out? Were they just standing around in a meeting, or sitting around in a meeting and suddenly they heard a voice like Saul heard on the Damascus road?” Well we know here there were prophets there. He says, “Prophets and teachers,” in verse 1, so we would probably be on safer ground to assume that when we read here that the Holy Spirit “said” that we are to understand that he spoke through the men who had the gift of prophesy. So, evidently, one of the men who was a prophet stood in the meeting and said the Holy Spirit has indicated to me that the church should separate Paul and Barnabas for missionary activity, for the preaching of the word, for the ministry of the word in the west. So amid the meeting of the church then, while they were there, while they were praying, while they were engaged in thinking over spiritual things, after all, that’s the best time for the Holy Spirit to speak to us isn’t it? When we really do have time to think about spiritual things, it seems to me that churches today very rarely have an opportunity to have the spirit of God really speak to the body of believers. We’re so busy doing things.

Sometimes in our meetings when we have a period of silence, we don’t have too many periods of silence now, but in the early days of Believers Chapel we used to have long periods of silence, and some people would say afterwards, “I get so uncomfortable

when there is silence.” I always think that’s great to have silence. I wish some of the people that spoke on Sunday night wouldn’t speak. No complaints, mind you, about particular speaking, although there are some I probably could make, including my own. But I like silence. I don’t think there’s a thing wrong with silence. Gives us an opportunity to think, and some of us, it seems to me, avoid thinking about spiritual things, find it very uncomfortable to have nothing but the Bible before them and thinking about the ministry of our Lord or other aspects of the spiritual life. That may be the only time during the week that some of us really think about spiritual things, really think, and really meditate. We surely have lost the art of meditating.

We are so busy moving to and fro. You get out on the highway. Isn't it interesting, all over the world, people are out on the highways, dodging other cars in the traffic. It doesn't make a bit of difference where you go. Well I have not been to some places. I haven't been to India, and I haven't been to China. They don't have many automobiles there. You have to dodge bicycles there, I'm sure. But where ever you are, people are out. And there's just a constant moving to and fro. It's amazing. That was one of the things that impressed me in our recent trip to Australia, that you would think a country of fifteen million people, it's as big as the United States, the mainland US, and there are only fifteen million people there, about one fifteenth of the people that we have here. In other words, there are fifteen Americans for 1 Australian. But they are all congregated in the cities, kind of around the continent, around the country, and so they're just as crowded there as we are, just as many cars.

So, as they ministered to the Lord and fasted, there was an earnest desire on the part of the Antiochian Christians to seek the face of God, even so much so that they fasted, and consequently, the Lord spoke to them. Now the Spirit chose Paul and Barnabas and the church, in response, separated them. “Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.” Now, notice that when the church was instructed through the prophets that Paul and Barnabas were chosen for the work, the

Holy Spirit didn't say, “Now Paul and Barnabas must go out on deputation work to get support for the work that they are going to be doing.” That's the way they do it in the modern church. The person says, “Well I feel the Lord's calling me to be a missionary, and so now I must go out and do deputation work.” And so they go from church to church to church for a year or two begging money. Again, that's something that, so far as I can tell, is not found in the Bible. Paul and Barnabas were separated. I would assume that from this they understood that God was going to stand behind them in that ministry. And so they went out by faith.

Naturally in a kind of ministry that I'm engaged in right now, I have lots of opportunity to talk to young men who believe that they, if not have been called to ministry, at least they believe they want to minister. And they've come to theological seminary. It's amazing how many of them have not been told by their professors that they're support is to come from the Lord. They look to churches. They look to individuals. And they do not really conceive of their responsibility first of all to look to the Lord, and if God has called them to believe that he will supply their needs. Evidently, their professors are not telling them some things that ought to be told them. It's a great comfort and great encouragement to think that God has guided me or you, as the case may be, into a form of ministry. And if he has guided you into that particular ministry, he intends to see that you are supported in it. Well you may not live like the Hunts, but you will survive. And it's important that we learn to trust the Lord. So I don't read of any deputational work here. They were called, and they felt that God would supply their needs, and so they launched out.

By the way, the Holy Spirit did not look down and say, “Well I think I'll call a couple of those lesser figures because the church at Antioch needs the best teaching possible. It's a big church, important church. No, the Holy Spirit picked the most eminent, most gifted of the prophets and teachers so far as we know. Now it may be true that Simeon and Lucius and Manaen were more outstanding expositors of the Scriptures

than Barnabas, the son of exhortation, and Paul, but I rather doubt that that was true. I think we would have heard of them. So, the Holy Spirit chose the most imminent and the most gifted men, and by the way, it was not a call to ministry.

Occasionally you hear people read these verses and look at them as a call to ministry. Paul was not called to ministry here. He had been ministering for years ahead of this. Barnabas had been ministering. He had been ministering in Antioch for a year or more and before that. So this was not a call to ministry. This was simply guidance to men who are already gifted by the Holy Spirit, giving them specific guidance regarding a new thrust that was to be made in their ministry. Isn't it interesting, we have so many things in Christianity that are built on haphazard study of the word of God? What we are talking about here is guidance. So far as I know, there isn't any such thing as a call to preach, but in the Southern Baptist church, just to use one illustration, I don't mean to attack them because this is common, but I know them. They use the term “call to preach,” a person is “called to preach.” And so you look for a “call to preach,” some specific experience called a “call to preach,” but so far as I can tell, there isn't anything like that.

The Apostle Paul had a special call to his apostolate, but “call to preach” is not a New Testament idea at all. Guidance for a man who has been given a spiritual gift is. So everyone has a spiritual gift. Some have utterance gifts, and some have non-utterance gifts. Those who have utterance gifts are responsible to be guided, find the Lord's guidance for them, just as those who have non-utterance gifts are to find the Lord's guidance for the use of their non-utterance gifts. This was nothing more than special guidance given to Barnabas and Saul. They were already ministering the word of God, but since now they are going to make a particular thrust toward the Gentiles and toward the west, as the church fasted, the Holy Spirit chose the men. The church separated them for that ministry. That is that specific form of ministry now in which they are to be engaged.

And we read in verse 3, “And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.” Must have been a happy time. The Holy Spirit has spoken through the prophets. The apostles felt that this was the will of God. They were ministering to the Lord, and they were fasting, and they fasted and prayed. And they asked that God be with the two and then they laid their hands on them. I assume that these prophets and teachers all gathered around and for the church laid hands upon Paul and Barnabas in token of their identification with them for the ministry in which they are going to be engaged. In other words, not everybody goes, but everybody has a part in the going of Paul and Barnabas.

Now when these two came back, we read in chapter 14 in verse 27 that they reported to the church, and that’s why I think that we are to understand that the church really sent them off. The prophets and teachers who were left, and the elders of the church, no doubt, acting for the church because in Acts 14:27 we read, “And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. And there they abode long time with the disciples.” I like that expression in verse 4, “So they, being sent forth by the Holy Spirit, departed unto Seleucia.”

Now notice the end of verse 3, “And laid their hands on them, they sent them away.” Now in the Greek text, there are two different words and the word in verse 3, “They sent them away,” is a word that means “released them.” And in verse 4, “So they, being sent forth,” well, that’s a word that really means to send forth. So, they were sent forth by the Holy Spirit. But they were released by the church. In other words, the church in all of this is following the direction of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit speaks through the prophets and says, “Separate me Barnabas and Saul.” The Holy Spirit sends them forth, and the church releases them. That is, the church enters into it, participating and rejoices in, and no doubt, helps them in leaving for the opening of the door of faith to the Gentiles.

Can you not see from this passage that men do not make ministers? Men do not give guidance to the servants of God. The church cannot make ministers. Seminaries cannot make ministers. All of those are false ideas built up through years, no doubt, of Christian tradition, but nevertheless, not biblical. It is the Holy Spirit who gives gifts, and it is he, the sovereign third person of the Trinity, who gives gifts as he wills. He's the one who creates gifted men and women. So men, the church, the seminaries, they don't make ministers. Never forget that. That's why some men can go to theological seminary for four years and go out and preach, and preach very acceptably, and some, come, take the same course, may even make higher grades, come out, and they just do not have the gift of utterance as the case may be. So, they were sent forth by the Holy Spirit, released by the church.

Now, don't, for one moment, think that because I'm stressing these things that the apostle is really trying to set out a kind of spirit of egalitarianism in which anybody in the church can get up and do ministry. I have the feeling often in our Sunday evening meetings that some of us get up who shouldn't be getting up and saying things. The reason I say that is because I have lots of people who say to me and probably to you too that, “Well I hear some very unedifying things on Sunday night,” inconsequential. They don't really have any spiritual thrust or force to them, and what we have sometimes is an overemphasis of freedom. That is, that there is a kind of equality in the meeting, and if a man has a spiritual gift, he may get up and instruct us. And we may be blessed and edified, and because he got up and ministered, a man feels he can get up and so he bores the saints and wastes their time with inconsequential things.

Only certain people have utterance gifts. Not everybody has an utterance gift, and if one doesn't have an utterance gift, he shouldn't be ministering the word of God. It's alright to get up and give thanks, to act as a priest, to make a comment or two, to read a passage, but ministry is an important thing and it should be done by those who have spiritual gifts under the direction of the Holy Spirit too. And even the gifted men

shouldn't get up if they're not led by the Holy Spirit in it. So, I'm not suggesting egalitarianism in which everybody stands on the same ground. They do not. We should distinguish always between priests and gifted men. Priests have the right to participate. Gifted men have the privilege of ministry as the Holy Spirit leads and guides.

Well, let's see what happens. Just take a brief look at verse 4 through verse 12, “So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.” This was probably relevant because Paul is led first of all to the hocus pocus loving Cypriots. They love their horoscopes. They love their Jean Dixons and Ouija boards, and they were afflicted with interest in things like ESP and Satan worship. And furthermore, it was Barnabas' home, and no doubt, that's one of the reasons they went there. Some were already believers too because in Acts chapter 11 it was said that some of the Cypriot believers had been preaching in Antioch. It was the meeting place of Greece in the east. It was the island in which Venus was worshiped. So they go to Cyprus. “And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John (that is John Mark) to their minister.” Well we read that the apostle with his company went through the island to Paphos, and Paphos was the capital of the island. It was the pro-councils home. It was the seat of immoral worship of Venus. And there they ran into a man by the name of Sergius Paulus and another man by the name of Barjesus. Let me just read these verses. Verse 6,

“And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus: Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) (Wise man, incidentally, Elymas means wise. So he was a magi, a wise man, sorcerer) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him. And said,

O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. (Incidentally, that's a word of grace, for a season) And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.”

Barjesus is described by Luke in a three-fold way, which is almost like a sledge hammer. He's a sorcerer. He's a false prophet and a Jew. Many of the false prophets, incidentally, were Jews because they had a knowledge of spiritual things. “Whose name was Barjesus,” the son of Joshua, what a name. Elymas, also, he was a sage. He was Cyprus' answer to Judea's Jesus, and he was out to con the deputy of the island, Sergius Paulus. But Sergius Paulus hadn't swallowed everything that Elymas had told him. He was a deputy and therefore was undoubtedly a man of skill. He's called here, “Sergius Paulus, a prudent man.” So he hadn't swallowed everything. He wanted the word. It was grace that was working in his heart when he heard about, Paul or Barnabas and Saul, he asked to hear them. The devil always dreads a man who dares to think. He's not afraid of all of those people who are the kind that when a teacher says now, “Close your eyes. Open your mouth. Swallow.” He's not afraid of that kind of person. There are lots of people that listen to teachers like that you know. “If Dr. Johnson said it, that's it.” They don't bother reading the Bible for themselves. Or if somebody else says it, that's it. Well he was not that kind of man. He hadn't swallowed everything.

Well, Barjesus didn't like Barnabas and Saul, and so they had some discussions. He withstood them. It's a vivid picture of debate and discussion. Just like Moses had his encounters with Jannes and Jambres, and so Peter had his difficulties with Paul who rebuked him to his face, Elymas was there, and no doubt he had all of the equivalence of the ancient higher criticism, bringing objections to Christianity as Paul preached it.



One thing you learn about Paul when you follow him is that he had a low flash point so far as heresy was concerned. Now that is very uncommon in the nineteen hundred and eighties. It's very bad to speak evilly of false teachers. And you shouldn't rebuke a Christian who is wrong in his doctrine. And you shouldn't rebuke somebody who is not a Christian because you might not have an opportunity to talk to him afterwards. Treat him in love, be nice to him. Don't just come out and say, “You apostate.” [Laughter] That's the first lesson in a course on evangelism. Don't do anything like that. [Laughter] Now, you can see, Paul broke the first law. He said, “O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?” No gentle appeals to Barjesus.

“And now, behold,” I love that because here is the apostle saying to the quailing Elymas, “You're a magic man aren't you Elymas, a sorcerer?” That's what they were. They were magic men. Now, I want to let you have a little bit of my magic. “And now, behold,” he says, “The hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind.” How fitting for this apostate, or this false religionists, this sorcerer, who is fighting the Christian faith in his blindness, how fitting for him to be made blind. “Thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun.” Now that little expression, “for a season,” is a word of grace for him, “For a season.” No doubt he had made all kinds of claims for the truth, but he really was blind, and so blindness fell upon him. And notice what it says, “And he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.” I can just hear him now, “Where are my specs? Oh Zeus, I can't see at all. What happened to me?” just all kinds of things that you can just imagine that this man is seeing as he is going blind. “Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord. Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.”

John Mark was a fine young man. He was related to Barnabas. That's probably why he was with the men. But he was a young man, and he was not a very experienced

man. And so when they got over in Perga and somebody told John, “Now Paul and Barnabas, they’re intending to go up into Pisidia.” Well Pisidia was a pretty rough kind of country, and so his courage began to ooze out of him. And so he skulked on home to his mother in Jerusalem. Later on, the New Testament tells us that John Mark is returned to the apostle’s favor because in 2 Timothy, you remember, he calls for Mark and says he’s “meet for the master’s use.”

Well it must have been exciting to be with Paul. It must have been exciting to travel with Barnabas. And it must have been exciting to see how the apostle not only dealt with men like Barjesus, but how he dealt with men like John Mark. One thing you learn, it seems to me as you read these things, is that they had a kind of pneumatic ministry, a kind of ministry in which there was a constant first hand contact with the Holy Spirit. They recognized the hand of God upon their lives. And no doubt in all of their experiences there was the sense of personal communion with the Lord. I really think that’s what the Lord wishes of us. He wants our lives daily to be characterized by the sense of the presence of God in all of the things in which we are engaged. And it appears to me that that’s something that we ought to ask the Lord to make a part of our lives that sense of the presence of the Lord, the sense of communion with him, not simply the emotional sense. I’m not speaking about that. But the certainty of the constant communion with him that makes life exciting as a Christian. May God help us to desire it by his grace and by his enabling power have something of it.

Let’s bow in a closing word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are thankful to Thee for these sections of the apostle’s life which speak so relevantly to us and our own spiritual relationship to Thee. We sense the earnestness of those early Christians who did not hesitate to fast in order to find Thy mind. Lord, give us earnestness as well in the Christian life that Thou hast called upon us

to live. May, Lord, we never consider that our daily life is just an ordinary kind of  
existence. Deepen our spiritual lives. Deepen our relationship to Thee...

**[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]**