

SPIRITUALLY ATTUNED

Acts 12:25-3:12

How spiritually attuned are you to the things of God? Do you know what God is doing in this age? Are you a part of it? Are you sensitive to the things of God? Seeking His will? Walking with Him? Or are you just wandering through life doing your own thing? That's the thrust of the text this morning in Acts. As we read it, take special note of individual names and the order they're in.

13:25 "And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission [of taking a love offering to the church there as you see in 11:29-30], taking along with them John, who was also called Mark. 4:1 Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2 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." 3 Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away."

I. THE CALL OF BARNABAS AND SAUL. (VV. 1-3)

Last week, Luke took us down to Jerusalem to see what was going on there. Persecution was flaring up again and James becomes the first martyred apostle. God rescues Peter and judges Herod, who is eaten by worms (a little TMI there). Today though, we're back up north in **Antioch** of Syria. For much of the book of Acts we have been in Jerusalem, with the Jerusalem church as the center of attention, but Antioch was introduced to us in Acts 11 and it becomes the **first major church established** outside Jerusalem. It becomes the focus and **base of operations**. You could say we're going from **the mother church** to now **the mission church**.

But not only are we switching locations, the **main personality** in the narrative is also changing. **Peter** has been the man of the hour, used to open the door of salvation to the **Jews** in Acts 2, the **Samaritans** (half Jews, half Gentile) in Acts 6, and the **Gentiles** (non-Jews) in Acts 10. But from here on out Peter is only mentioned briefly and the gospel moves to the expanses of the Roman Empire via the **Saul/Paul**. All 3 of Saul's missionary journey's will be launched from Antioch.

	Places	Chapters	Personality	Gospel Receptivity	Date
1 st Section	Jerusalem	1-7	Peter	Jewish	A.D. 33-34
2 nd Section	Judea & Samaria	8-12	Peter	Jew & Gentile	A.D. 35-48
3 rd Section	Uttermost	13-28	Paul	Mostly Gentile	A.D. 48-62

So this is a major turning point in the outline of the book of Acts and **the 3rd and final section** of Acts. Acts 1:8 is the outline for this book. *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria,*

and even to the uttermost parts of the earth.” Well, Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria have all been flooded with the gospel and now the gospel is going to the uttermost. It’s exciting stuff!

And just think about the timeline of events a bit: up until this point in Acts, it seems like a lot of what has been happening has been the spontaneous leading of the Spirit or spontaneous advancement due to persecution. Newborn believers in Christ have been doing a lot of learning and stretching beyond their comfort zones as God shows them how His program has shifted because of what Christ did: no more temple and living under the Law of Moses, dirty Samaritans and Gentiles accepted, persecution... It’s all fresh and new. However, in the 15 years or so since Pentecost, the Church is starting to understand how God’s program has shifted. This early spontaneity and youthfulness of **the Church is maturing** and they are becoming more and more aware of what God is doing and becoming more organized – more intentional.

Also be reminded from Acts 1:8 that it is **the Spirit who empowers and guides the witnesses of Jesus**, which is exactly what we see in our text. There is an emphasis on the Person of the Spirit in Acts. He is not a force, but **a Person with divine intentions for our lives to be part of God’s program**. He is the One who gives us new life and a new nature and power over sin and spiritual gifts us and reveals God’s call on our life as we walk with Him. That’s our first takeaway.

Spiritually attuned believers walk in step with the Spirit.

Another way of saying that is they are **filled with the Spirit**. They obey His clearly revealed will in Scripture and don’t habitually walk by the lusts of the flesh. In order to be spiritually attuned to God and His leading, we must walk with Him. When we sin and start walking by the flesh, we need to understand our fellowship with God is broken at that point – we’re still family but there’s an interruption in the connectivity – we’re out of tune with Him. So at that point, we repent and confess it (1 John 1:9) and get back to walking in harmony, in step, with the Spirit. We walk circumspectly and sensitively with God and become more aware of how He is speaking to us through various means (written Word, worship service, other believers). But it will always line up with His Word. When the Spirit said to *“set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work which I have called them,”* we don’t know exactly how He did it – audibly? through the prophets? a still small voice in their hearts? I don’t know. But there’s probably a reason Luke didn’t get specific – so that we wouldn’t insist God to do the same for us before we’re willing to follow.

Now let’s just **think about these 5 men** for a bit. For **one**, they are called **prophets and teachers**. You have to think, this is before the New Testament was written. How did anyone know what New Testament theology and practice was? They were so used to following the Mosaic Law and the oral traditions passed down. Well, the answer is in prophets. Divine revelation was delivered prophetically until the New Testament was completed. Then they, or others with the gift of teaching would break down what God said or what Scripture had been written for the people to understand and apply. In addition to the Old Testament, that’s how this early early church was edified. By the way, aren’t you glad you have a completed record of God’s revelation and He

doesn't have to keep revealing the same stuff over and over? You have what He desired to them in one nice and neat book that you can study. How cool is that to think about!

Spiritually attuned believers listen to the Word of God.

They pay attention to it because God speaks through His living, written Word (Heb. 4:12). It's through the written Word that He mainly communicates with us. God can mightily use people who know the Word. These men were men of the Word.

We can also learn something from their names and descriptions.

- **Barnabas** is a Jew from the island of Cyprus.
- **Simeon** is a Jewish name but his Latin name is **Niger** which means black, indicating he's dark skinned and likely an African Jewish believer.
- **Lucius**, a common Roman name, is from Cyrene in North Africa and probably a Hellenistic believer (a Greek-influenced Jew).
- **Manaen** is someone that grew up with Herod as a childhood friend or maybe a foster brother. This is likely the Herod Antipas who killed John the Baptist and tried Jesus. If Manaen and Herod were childhood friends, that might explain Luke's insight into Herod's circle in Luke and Acts. He records things about Herod that others don't.
- **Saul** we know is an ex-staunch Pharisee from Jerusalem. He is a Hebrew of Hebrews.

This is a very diverse bunch of men! 5 men from different places with different backgrounds and cultures worshipping the Lord and working together in cosmopolitan Antioch church that was extremely diverse. It's amazing because churches like this are typically a recipe for disaster. But these men are spiritually attuned because they focus on their unity in Christ and on the mission of advancing the gospel.

Spiritually attuned believers stay focused on the mission.

When you're focused on the mission, you're focused on the eternal things that really matter and less likely to divide over things that don't matter.

Let's also note that **the call of God to missions comes during worship** – as they are “*ministering to the Lord and fasting*” it says. Their **fasting** probably tells us **they were eagerly seeking the Lord's will in how to advance the gospel**. They've picked up on what God is doing in this new church program and they want in on it. They don't want to sit around idly or do their own thing, but like Romans 12:1-2, they are offering themselves to God in complete surrender so they can know His good and pleasing and perfect will for them. They have no reservations saying, “*I will serve God if...*” No conditions. No worldly idols holding them back. They are eager to do and go where God wills – to do the works God has prepared for them (Ephesians 2:10).

Spiritually attuned believers surrender to God.

And I like their worship described as “**ministering to the Lord**”. Quite often we talk about how a church service or some person really ministered to them. Well, a church service where people are genuinely devoted to the Lord and praising Him with all eyes on Him, refreshes His heart. He delights in those who delight to do His will and He responds to that. One of the prayers that Jacob and the board and I pray for is that our worship services would be times where we really encounter the living God and sense His speaking into our lives to your change us and guide us.

I just want to say there’s nothing like knowing that you doing God’s will for your life. I’m afraid that many of us and especially our young people don’t consider the works God has prepared for them from eternity past (Eph. 2:10). They go to the high school job fairs and do what they want, or listen to the voice of an adult who says to make the big money and retire early. That’s not what this life is about. It’s primarily about doing God’s will – following His will as He leads you through life. That’s what is most important. That might mean staying. That might mean going. That might staying now and going later, I don’t know what that looks like for you. For me, I’ve experienced both. God’s will for me as a young believer was to stay and soak in His Word and get involved in youth group or teach Sunday school to 3-4 kids for 3 years. One year I poured my heart and my soul into taking care of the church property. All that time God was leading me to the pastorate but it was the year after Bible school, after the missions, when I was taking care of that church property that God spoke to me the loudest saying I needed to be ready. And I just kept worship-walking with God and His call came at just the right time. But I had to be faithful where I was. We all do.

This passage is so good for understanding God’s will for our lives. And don’t miss this: the call of God takes place in a **local church context**.

Spiritually attuned believers are involved in a local church.

The church recognized Barnabas and Saul were called by God. It’s in the body of Christ, a group of believers, that starts to recognize your gifting as you interact with the other members of the body (1 Cor. 12). If you are not connected to a worshipping body of believers, you are likely not exercising your gifts or exercising them to your full potential because the gifts were given to you so that you would steward them by ministering in and to the body. That’s how a body works. I don’t care what the Adam’s Family says, a hand or an eye doesn’t do any good without being connected to the body. Anyway, the men lay hands on them and pray over them (spiritually attuned people are people who pray!) and **send them away**. **John Mark**, writer of the gospel of Mark, also joins them first the first part of the 1st missionary journey. He would be very helpful as he had more personal, first-hand knowledge of Christ’s life.

4 “So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. 5 When they reached Salamis [in eastern Cyprus], they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper. 6 When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos [in western Cyprus], they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus [son of Jesus], 7 who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus [earth born], a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to

hear the word of God. 8 But Elymas [wise/wizard] the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. 9 But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him, 10 and said, “You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? 11 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. 12 Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord.”

II. THE EVENTS IN CYPRUS. (VV. 4-12)

Barnabas and Saul go to the port city of **Seleucia** west of Antioch and from there sail about 100 miles west to the Mediterranean island of **Cyprus**, Barnabas’ old stomping grounds. This is a Greek island; the third largest island in the Med.; and is about 140 miles long and 60 miles wide; and its shape reminds me of a swordfish (just saying). As they work their way from **Salamis** (the old capital and major city on the east) to **Paphos** (the new capital on the west) they are **preaching the good news** in the **synagogues**. The island was mostly Greek, but there were many Jews on the island and synagogues are basically for the Jews what local churches are for us today – places for believers to gather and worship and seekers to learn. Synagogue means “gathering together”.

But this is a **pattern that we will see in Saul’s methodology**: Saul enters a city, visits the **Jewish synagogues** to share the gospel with Jews, typically finds **rejection**, then **turns to the Gentiles** where he typically finds more **acceptance**. His method is to the Jew first, then to the Gentile (Rom. 1:16; 11:11-16). It was a theological and God-ordained methodology for Paul who loved his Jewish brethren according to the flesh and desperately wanted to see them trust Christ (Rom. 9:1-5). And we can learn from that because spiritually attuned people share the gospel, even if rejected.

Spiritually attuned believers share the gospel.

They share it because they understand that peoples’ eternity rests on their response to the gospel. Eternal judgment in hell comes to those who reject it and eternal salvation to those who believe it – those who trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin. It’s a door to one or the other.

But this episode between where the **Jewish sorcerer** opposes the gospel and **Sergius** receives it is just a small foretaste of Saul’s ministry to come and a **key event in the narrative** Luke presents. It **highlights the hinge that Acts 13 is**ⁱ because **one**, it demonstrates that as the church progresses to the uttermost, the Gentile darkness is overpowered by the light of Christ. This contrast between darkness and light will continue throughout chapter 13. **Second** again, it is a glimpse of ministry to come on the missionary journeys with the hardhearted Jew and receptivity of the Gentile to the gospel – a theological reality discussed in depth in Romans. **Third**, it establishes in the reader’s mind and in church history that **Saul is a divinely appointed apostle like Peter**. Peter confronted a sorcerer named Simon in Acts 8:9-24, and now Saul encounters his own sorcerer and begins to

take a leading role. The parallelism by Luke is unmistakably intentional. Saul has replaced Peter as the main protagonist personality.

And Luke emphasizes this hinge from **Peter to Paul** and from **Jew to Gentile** in a fun way by the use of names. It was common for people to have a Jewish and a Roman name. **Saul** was his Hebrew name but **Paul** we could say is his Roman name, which is the name he will use now in light of his ministry to the Gentile world.ⁱⁱ From here on out, unless it's talking about his Damascus Road conversion, Saul goes by Paul. Also, whereas Saul was listed last in the five men (13:1) and it was "*Barnabas and Saul, Barnabas and Saul, Barnabas and Saul,*" (11:30; 12:25; 13:2, 7) it will now be "*Paul and his companions*" or just "*Paul and Barnabas*". Paul moves to the forefront of attention both in the text and in history. The names and the order of them are the literary clues by Luke that help us understand the thrust of this text and his authorial intent.

In sum, I want to ask us those questions again: "*How spiritually attuned are you to the things of God and what He is doing today? His program? His will? Are you sensitive to the things of God? The gospel? The mission? His will for you in His mission?*" If you want to be spiritually attuned to the things of God, the first step is believing the gospel – the good news that Jesus died for you and rose again. Unless you do that, you are in spiritual darkness and can't understand the things of God because they're spiritually appraised by the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Spiritually attuned people have believed in Christ.

Sergius and Bar-Jesus good examples of that. They are a contrast showing us one who is becoming attuned and one who isn't. Saul calls **Bar-Jesus** [which means son of Jesus], Bar-devil – son of the devil – for seeking to turn Sergius away from the faith – from the things of God. He is not a genuine son of Jesus. There is intentional irony in both of his names because his other name, **Elymas**, means *wise*. He's not wise because he rejected Christ and is judged for it. He will continue to wander in unbelief until judgment day unless he repents. **Sergius Paulus** is described as **intelligent** and he really is because he believes the gospel. In light of eternity, the intelligent thing to do is to trust Christ as your Savior from sin. Have you? And if you have, keep worshipping by surrendering your life to Christ and keep walking step with Him, doing His will. I couldn't help but think of that poem **Only One Life** by missionary C. T. Studd.

*Two little lines I heard one day,
Traveling along life's busy way;
Bringing conviction to my heart,
And from my mind would not depart;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.*

*Only one life, yes only one,
Soon will its fleeting hours be done;
Then, in 'that day' my Lord to meet,
And stand before His Judgement seat;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,*

Only what's done for Christ will last.

*Only one life, the still small voice,
Gently pleads for a better choice
Bidding me selfish aims to leave,
And to God's holy will to cleave;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.*

*Only one life, a few brief years,
Each with its burdens, hopes, and fears;
Each with its days I must fulfill,
living for self or in His will;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.*

*When this bright world would tempt me sore,
When Satan would a victory score;
When self would seek to have its way,
Then help me Lord with joy to say;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.*

*Give me Father, a purpose deep,
In joy or sorrow Thy word to keep;
Faithful and true what e'er the strife,
Pleasing Thee in my daily life;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.*

*Oh let my love with fervor burn,
And from the world now let me turn;
Living for Thee, and Thee alone,
Bringing Thee pleasure on Thy throne;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.*

*Only one life, yes only one,
Now let me say, "Thy will be done";
And when at last I'll hear the call,
I know I'll say "twas worth it all";
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.*

ⁱ Andy Woods, *Overview of Acts*.

ⁱⁱ Steven Ger, *Acts: Beginning in Jerusalem...*