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The Unstoppable Church

Appointed to Eternal Life

Acts 12:25 – 13:52

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We have been studying the mission of the church and the importance of realizing we are to be witnesses and proclaimers of the life-changing message of Jesus.

Let's imagine you take that seriously and you think, *I need to be more proactive about this*. So you pray about it, and the Holy Spirit leads you to share the gospel with somebody and they don't respond very well. They don't give you a big hug and say, "Boy, thanks for sharing that!" But rather, there seems to be some conflict and there's tension. And that leads to more tension, and it spreads and pretty soon the whole thing is just a big mess, kind of a big disaster.

We had this in our neighborhood several years ago. It just kind of all got out of hand. And you're wondering, *Where is God in all of this? What's happened? Obviously I did something wrong*. Oftentimes because of that, we find ourselves saying, "I'm not exactly sure what happened, and I'm not sure where God was in all this, but I'm never going to do that again."

I think in our minds we have this idea that if we're called of God, if we're filled with the Spirit, if we're proclaiming the truth, that things should just go smoothly. In Acts 13 we find ourselves reorienting our perspective to better understand what happens on those occasions and what we might expect.

Chapter 12:25 is a transition verse; it's kind of a hinge from the previous section to a new section in the Book of Acts. In chapter 11, there was talk about famine in Judea, in the Jerusalem area. Barnabas and Saul were given the responsibility to go down and bring some famine relief. Then we had an ongoing story in chapter 12. The last verse is the hinge that tells us that's done, and it really opens a new era in the Book of Acts.

And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark. 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. 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." Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. (Acts 12:25 – 13:3, *NASB)

You remember the church in Antioch is now becoming the home base, the sending church for what we will study in the Book of Acts from this point forward. He mentions in verse 1 there were prophets and teachers. One of the questions that often arises is: When they were teaching in the New Testament church, what were they teaching? They didn't have the New Testament Scripture, so what were they teaching?

One of the ways, maybe the most common way that God spoke was through New Testament prophets, where they would literally open up their mouth and, "thus saith the Lord." Then that would be the basis by which they would teach and proclaim and disciple.

As the New Testament came together, the Scriptures were completed and the need for that gift really ceased. Another way of saying that is we don't believe the Scriptures are still being written today. Once they were completed, as we have them, the need for that unique gift of a prophet had ended.

But I think the point Luke is trying to make here is that the church in Antioch was being driven by the word of God. It came through prophets. It came through the teachers, but that was front and center, defining who they were and what they were to be about. And he names five of them—some of them we're familiar with, some not. Barnabas we know. Simeon, who is called Niger (a word that means black, probably from North Africa, just as Lucius of Cyrene, which is North African), and then Manaen who had been brought up with Herod. The words "being brought up" means he was either a foster child or just a very close family friend.

So you have interesting dynamics. You have a multiracial church and you have people from various spheres of influence gathered together now as the church of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit calls Saul and Barnabas out to a very unique mission, what we will refer to as the first missionary journey of Paul. This is really a new era in the church. They have been here and there, but this is the first time they really go on a true mission trip and spread the gospel.

Notice in the text it is not the church that calls them; it is the Holy Spirit that calls them. The church simply affirms that or embraces that. Notice also they were not mavericks out doing their own thing, but they were working within the context of a local church. The Holy Spirit called them. They gathered together. They believed this is what God wanted. And they affirmed that, and with their blessing they sent them out.

The idea of laying their hands on them is the idea that it's a commissioning; it's an extension of us. Later in this service we will be commissioning Matt and Rachel Ashcraft. When they go out from us, they aren't just going out *from us*; they are going out *for us*. They are going out as part of our church on behalf of our commitment to reach lost people, whether they're here in Lincoln or whether they're in Spain or somewhere else in the world.

I think sometimes people get the impression that missionaries are called and pastors are called, but most people aren't called, and that simply isn't true. The New Testament is clear that every single one of us who has trusted Christ as Savior is called. Most of you are called to the marketplace. Some are called to be pastors. Some are called to be missionaries. But in God's eyes, each call is just as important, just as valuable. We need to be obedient to our call.

This text does remind us that the call of a missionary to go overseas is a significant call. I don't think it's higher, but I think it's a very valuable, unique calling that needs to be celebrated by the church, and a little bit later we'll have an opportunity to do that.

So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. When they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper. When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed

his gaze on him, 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? 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. Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord. (vs. 4-12)

Saul and Barnabas go down to a nearby port and sail to Cyprus. Cyprus was really a very lovely island. They landed on the east coast and worked their way to the west coast.

One of the themes that comes out in this text is the repetition of the phrase “the word of God,” “the word of the Lord.” I think the opening with the statement “the prophets and teachers” and then this repetition is saying that the church was being driven by the truth of God. In other words, the mission was not to go out with a political platform or with some platform based on social issues. It was not a bunch of people’s opinions. It *was* the word of God.

Over the last several years there have been a number of books by various authors that all have kind of a common theme. These authors all grew up in very rigid, legalistic, negative, fundamentalist, arrogant churches, and because of that they really got turned off about God and they drifted away. And then they drifted back, but they experienced more of the God of the Bible than what they experienced growing up. But what has tended to happen is the pendulum swings too far, then, to the other side and they tend to minimize truth. They seem to be saying, “You know, truth isn’t all that important; it’s not that big of deal. We can’t really know it anyway, so let’s just kind of love Jesus and hug on one another and everything will work out.”

In many ways, many of these authors have become every bit as arrogant and every bit as legalistic as what they walked away from; it’s just the pendulum is on the other side now. I understand what they are reacting to; it’s the movement I grew up in, so I appreciate that. But learning to keep the pendulum in the middle and not make these big swings is the key.

There is no question that from Genesis to Revelation God says truth matters—that truth is very important, that the Word of God has got to be what directs us, has to be our anchor, has to be what drives us. We come to the Scripture in humility. We don’t have to be arrogant like the legalistic fundamentalist churches were. But we do have to take our stand on truth. This is the Book that guides us. This is the Book that drives us. This is the Book that defines us, and we can never lose that. That comes up over and over again in this particular text.

When they get to the western side of Cyprus to Paphos, they run into a false teacher by the name of Bar-Jesus, which means “son of salvation.” In other words, he is a false prophet. He is named one thing but does another. Luke identifies his other name, Elymas, which basically means he is a magician, a trickster. He is pretending to represent God and pretending to lead people to God, but he is actually leading people farther away from God.

He worked with Sergius Paulus, who was the proconsul (we would probably use the term governor), who is a spiritual seeker. He is hungry, wanting to know the truth. So he invites Saul and Barnabas to come and tell him more. Well, as soon as that happens, then Bar-Jesus gets in there and creates opposition because he doesn’t want them to hear from Saul and Barnabas. He wants to control this environment and keep him away from God.

In the context of this, it is interesting, then, to see how Paul responds to this. As a matter of fact, Luke (almost just in passing) tells us that Saul had another name and that was Paul. Saul was his Hebrew name; Paul was his Greek name. And from this point on in the rest of the Book of Acts, he will be known as Paul, and of course that is how we most commonly know him. It is a reflection that his mission is now to the Gentiles, and that is the name he will use.

But notice what Paul does when this false prophet gets in his way. He first goes up and gives him a big hug and says, “You know, we all need to get along; Jesus loves us all and all roads lead to heaven, so let’s just kind of work this thing out.” Well, that’s *not* what he does at all. As a matter of fact, he is pretty direct. He says, “You know, you’re a son of the devil. You’re a liar. You’re a deceiver. How long will you make crooked the straight ways of God?” That’s a way of saying, “How long will you pretend to represent God? You pretend to be speaking the truth, and yet what you’re actually doing is using that to lure people away from God.” And there is this judgment that he will be made blind, and that is exactly what happens.

Now in this culture of so-called tolerance, there might be those who would read this and say, “You know, I think Paul wasn’t very nice; I think he wasn’t very loving. I mean, what would Jesus do? He wouldn’t have done that. Jesus would have given him a big hug.”

Right before Paul says what he says, Luke tells us Paul was “**filled with the Holy Spirit,**” which is a way of saying this is *exactly* what God wanted him to do.

It is very important we understand that there are people around us who are spiritually confused, people that are seeking and searching, and they’re all mixed up. And we could have a tremendous amount of grace and patience and forgiveness with these people.

But there are also those out there who pretend to represent God, whose missions in life are to deceive people and lead them away from God. They are tools of the devil; they are in a different category. We don’t hold hands with those people. They need to be confronted. They need to be challenged. These people are very dangerous. Just because people say they represent God doesn’t mean that they do. We are reminded in this text that this is a war, and Satan has his army and his soldiers. And those people who oppose the truth of God need to be dealt with in very strong terms.

Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord. (v. 12)

In verse 12, the proconsul Sergius Paulus saw what happened and believed. He saw the power of God. He was amazed at the teaching of God, and he embraced the message and his life was changed.

Now what happened here? What happened here is Saul and Barnabas were called by God, they were led by the Holy Spirit, they were filled by the Holy Spirit. They proclaimed the message of God, and it turned into a war.

We need to remember that this is exactly that: It is war. There is no way the devil is going to let his prisoners of war go without a fight. If you’re thinking because you’re called of God, because you’re filled with the Spirit, because you’re proclaiming the truth of God that there is never going to be conflict, that it will always work out and people are going to hug you and say, “Thanks for sharing that,” you’re going to be disappointed and you’re going to be hurt. You

need to reorient your perspective and realize that this is war, and there is going to be conflict. These situations are not going to be easy.

But in the midst of that, there is also one who longed to hear the truth, responded to the truth, and his life was changed forever. In a nutshell, that is what this text is about. It is about the reality that this is war. There will always be opposition and there will always be those who will be changed forever. That is the reality of accomplishing the mission that God has given us.

Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John left them and returned to Jerusalem. (v. 13)

So we've left Cyprus. We've gone to Perga, and there John Mark heads home. We're not really told reasons why. We're told earlier that he came along as a helper; that's really all Luke says. That word "helper" means to be like a servant. We're really not sure what to do with this. Was he called? The Scripture doesn't say he was called. Was it just Barnabas' idea to bring him? It seems like it just turns into a big mess. He goes back home. Luke doesn't say anything more. We aren't going to say anything more; we'll pick it up later in Acts when it comes up again.

But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, "Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it." (vs. 14-15)

So they arrive at the city of Antioch, which is about a hundred miles up through the mountains, about 3,600 feet above sea level. They go into the synagogue and the Scripture is read, which is typical. If a visiting rabbi was there, it was customary to invite that rabbi to stand up and to have a word. Now, I'm guessing they didn't anticipate the word they were about to get.

Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it. For a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness. When He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance—all of which took about four hundred and fifty years. After these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. After He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, 'I HAVE FOUND DAVID the son of Jesse, A MAN AFTER MY HEART, who will do all My will.' From the descendants of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.' " (vs. 16-25)

Paul does the same thing we've seen Peter and Stephen do, and that is he goes through this review of the Old Testament Scriptures. I've mentioned before, one of the interesting features of Acts is to look at how the presenters of the message customize it to their audience. Every time someone is talking to a highly Jewish audience, it is a reminder of what the Old Testament Scriptures had to say: that God made a promise He would bring salvation, and He unfolded that

promise through thousands of years. Even though the people of God were not always obedient and sometimes really messed up, God was always faithful and sovereignly fulfilled His promise all the way through David, and through David would come the promised Messiah. Finally that Messiah came—Jesus of the family of David—and even a promise that God would send a prophet and he would announce that the Messiah had come.

In essence, what is being said is if it isn't enough that this Messiah would perfectly fulfill all of the Scriptures that told of His coming, just in case people might miss it, God is going to do one more thing and raise up a prophet. And the job of that prophet is to walk along and say, "This is the guy!" You know, just in case people might miss it, that was his role: "By the way, this is the guy. Jesus is here! The Messiah is here! Just in case you might miss Him, there He goes!"

Now you would think with all of that, it would be impossible to miss Him. God has done everything possible to say, "Here He is—right there! Don't miss it!" But of course, we know the story: They completely missed it. Verse 26:

“Brethren, sons of Abraham’s family, and those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent. For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him. And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed. When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. But God raised Him from the dead; and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people. And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, ‘YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU.’ As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: ‘I WILL GIVE YOU THE HOLY and SURE blessings OF DAVID.’ Therefore He also says in another Psalm, ‘YOU WILL NOT ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.’ For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay; but He whom God raised did not undergo decay. (vs. 26-37)

Basically He is saying that even though Jesus perfectly fulfilled the message of the prophets, even though John the Baptist kept pointing to Him and saying, "This is He," they didn't get it. The religious leaders in Jerusalem didn't get it. They didn't see the fulfillment of Scripture. And by rejecting Jesus, they actually fulfilled the prophecies that they were reading in the synagogue—that the Messiah would be rejected. They knew Jesus hadn't done anything wrong, yet they talked Pilot into executing Him. He was buried, but after three days He rose. And there were all these witnesses that saw the resurrected Christ, and they were now everywhere proclaiming the message.

It is important to remember that even though the Book of Acts only traces Paul from this point on, that all eleven of the remaining apostles were out in different places of the world proclaiming the same message and basically living out the same story.

A couple of years ago when we were in India, I had the privilege of standing in the exact place where they believe Thomas the apostle was executed for his faith. And you realize how

far Thomas got from where he was in Jerusalem, throughout India as a proclaimer of the message of Jesus. Almost all of the apostles were martyred for their faith, and they spread out throughout the world, and that is what Paul is saying. These witnesses that saw the resurrected Christ are now proclaiming the message, and they would ultimately die for what they knew to be true.

He talks about the fact that even though David was a great man when he died, he went to the grave; his body decayed. But Jesus, when He went into the grave, was resurrected; His body will never undergo decay. Jesus was in a different category. Jesus was God in the flesh.

And then he gets to the point in verse 38:

“Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.” (vs. 38-39)

So Paul gets to the point: This Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures. He is the promise of salvation that God made back to generations gone by, and those who believe that Jesus died on the cross for their sins, was buried and rose again, experience forgiveness of sin and they are free from the penalty and the bondage of sin. They are “justified” is actually the Greek word. It is a legal term that means to be declared legally righteous before God.

And then he says, “...something that the Law could never do for you.” These people were steeped in religion. They kept their religion diligently. They went through all of the religious duties, the religious performances, and they tried to live good lives. They believed all of that would somehow make them right before God. But what Paul is saying is no amount of religious performance, no amount of good works, no amount of doing any religious stuff can do for you what Jesus did for you. On the basis of God becoming flesh, dying on the cross, salvation of sin is offered to you. You can be declared right before God simply on the basis of faith.

Then he utters a very important warning to them in verse 40:

“Therefore take heed, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon you: ‘BEHOLD, YOU SCOFFERS, AND MARVEL, AND PERISH; FOR I AM ACCOMPLISHING A WORK IN YOUR DAYS, A WORK WHICH YOU WILL NEVER BELIEVE, THOUGH SOMEONE SHOULD DESCRIBE IT TO YOU.’ ” (vs. 40-41)

So basically he is saying that God will do everything possible to make His truth evident, and it will be obvious to everyone. But there will always be those people that, no matter what God does, they simply will not believe, and because of that they will ultimately perish in their sins.

The warning to them two thousand years ago is the warning to us today. The reality of God’s life-changing power is everywhere around us. But there will always be those who, no matter what God does, will simply refuse to believe it. And the warning of course is that we would not be found among those; that we would believe what is obviously true.

As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath. Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God. (vs. 42-43)

Even though there were those who didn't listen, there were many others who did. They were fascinated by this message, and they kept begging Paul and Barnabas, "We want to hear more, we want to hear more! Make sure you come back next week!" You know, I can easily relate to that. Every weekend people are begging for more: "We want a longer service, more and more preaching!" (Come to think of it, I think that was that dream I had.)

The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming. Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, 'I HAVE PLACED YOU AS A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES, THAT YOU MAY BRING SALVATION TO THE END OF THE EARTH.' "

When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region. (vs. 44-49)

The word had spread, and nearly the whole city shows up. These Jewish teachers are jealous because people didn't show up to hear them teach, and now everybody's coming to hear Paul and Barnabas. So they try to create trouble and try to oppose all of this.

Paul speaks to them very directly and basically says, "It was right for us to come to you to present the message. You had the opportunity to hear it and believe it. But on the basis of the fact that you have rejected the only means of salvation, you're not worthy of eternal life." In other words, "You have rejected the one and only way to have forgiveness of sin and eternal life with God." He says, "Therefore, since you don't want to hear it, we're going to take the message to the Gentiles"—which is the fulfillment of the Old Testament Prophets.

The reality is, those of us who have spent much time trying to present the gospel to people have found it to be true that the most difficult people to reach are highly religious people. They are so locked into their beliefs and locked into their religion and their performance and all of that, they just don't want to hear it. They don't want to hear it, they don't want to talk about it, they don't want to consider what might be true. And oftentimes the most pagan, irreligious, far-from-God people are the ones most responsive to the message.

So what Paul is saying is, "Listen, if you people don't want to hear it, that's fine. There are a lot of people that do." They're going to take the message to these Gentiles, and this is now a major shift in the Book of Acts.

It's very important that you understand what was said in verse 46, because what he is saying is the reason these people do not receive eternal life is because, at the choice of their own will, they have rejected the message. That helps us with what is said in verse 48—that there will always be those who are appointed for salvation who will believe. Now you say, "What does that mean?" Well, it is basically a doctrine we refer to as election. It is a doctrine that God has appointed those who will believe, that God has elected those who will ultimately believe the message and trust Jesus as Savior. But you have to balance the reality of God's sovereign election with the will to choose that people have.

In verse 46 it doesn't say that these people did not inherit eternal life because God didn't appoint them. It says because of their own will, they chose not to believe. So you have to balance the reality that people have a will to choose, and everyone has that option, with the fact that salvation is ultimately a part of God's sovereign plan and God has elected those who will believe. You say, "How can both of those be true?" And the answer is I don't know, but the Scripture clearly teaches both and we have to believe both.

The reality is when I am proclaiming the message, I can expect opposition. But I also know that there are people where I work, there are people where I go to school, there are people in my neighborhood that have been appointed by God for salvation, and they are longing to hear the truth. And when they hear the message they will understand it, they will believe it, they will embrace it, and their lives will be changed forever. That is the reality of what Paul is saying.

But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. But they shook off the dust of their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.” (vs. 50-52)

These Jewish leaders that opposed the message of the gospel stir up trouble, and Paul and Barnabas are chased out of town. It says they are persecuted. If you read 2 Timothy 3 and 2 Corinthians 11, both of them mention that Paul and Barnabas were beaten with rods when they got thrown out of town. It was an ugly scene. This wasn't, "You know, you're going to have to leave now." They dragged them out and beat them up and left them there.

But Paul and Barnabas shook off the dust of their feet, which basically was a way of saying, "Okay, if that's the way you want to be, we're going to take this message somewhere else," and everyone is left rejoicing and celebrating what God is doing.

Now what's happening here? This is a long text with a lot of detail, but what is the point? Well, I think from beginning to end the point is God calls us, God empowers us, God leads us to the Holy Spirit, God gives us a message to proclaim. But we must understand this is war. Every place that Paul went there was opposition. It was a fight every step of the way. We tend to think if God calls us, if God fills us, if God leads us, then that means everything is going to work out. But that just isn't true. That just doesn't align with what the Book of Acts teaches.

What it teaches is the opposite: that those people out there who do not know Jesus are prisoners of war of the devil, and there is no way the devil is going to give them up without a fight. We are engaging in a battle, and we need to have that kind of a mindset—that everybody is not going to see that this message of the gospel is a good thing. It is going to create conflict. It is going to create tension. It is going to be a challenge. And we need to know that going in.

But in every place, there are those people whom God has prepared for salvation, and God wants to use you as a tool to present the message—that their lives might be changed forever. Every place you work, where you go to school, your neighborhood, where you do your hobbies, there are people whom God has prepared. God has appointed them for salvation. They are just waiting to hear the message.

But you need to know there is going to be opposition. It is not going to be easy. It's going to be a battle. That's the way it works. But I'll guarantee you this, when you look into the eyes of that person whom God has prepared and you see that light go on as they trust Jesus as Savior and

their lives are changed forever—not for a week, not for a year; they are changed forever—in that moment you will know whatever tension there was, whatever conflict there was, it was worth the cost because you have been a part of something that will still matter a hundred thousand years from now.

Will it be easy? It will *not* be easy. You are called. You are filled. You are empowered. You have been given the message. But it is going to be a battle.

But I guarantee you, every time someone comes to Christ, in your heart you will say, *It is worth the cost because I've been a part of something that will last forever.* That is why the last verse of this story ends, "...and they **were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit**"—because they knew no matter what the opposition, they had been a part of something that will ultimately matter.

Our Father, we're thankful that You are a faithful God. You call us, You empower us, You lead us, You give us the message. Lord, when we read the story of Paul and Barnabas, we're reminded that this is war, that the devil is not going to give up without a fight. And we are naïve to think that everything is just going to go smoothly if we decide to be about the mission that You have given us. Lord, I pray that You would give us the necessary courage and boldness to faithfully proclaim the message of Jesus. Lord, right now at this moment there are people all over our community that are appointed for salvation. Their hearts are ready to hear and to respond, and You want to use us to be instruments to declare the message, that we might know that we've been a part of something that will matter forever. Lord, I pray that You would give us what we need to be faithful to our calling. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Study Questions
The Unstoppable Church
Appointed To Eternal Life
Acts 12:25 - 13:52
Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. What comes to mind when you think of sharing the gospel with someone?

What initial thoughts and emotions surface? Why?

2. Because we are called by God and filled with the Holy Spirit to be His witnesses, does that mean things will always go smoothly? Why or why not?

Is tension or conflict an indication we did something wrong?

3. If we are going to take seriously God's call to be His witnesses, what should we expect and how might an accurate expectation keep us from getting discouraged?

Bible Study

1. Read Acts 12:25 - 13:52. Notice the emphasis on the "word of God" (see Acts 13:5, 7, 12, 15, 44, 46, 48, 49). What do we learn from this concerning the content of our message to those who don't know Jesus?

2. Notice also the number of times we are reminded of the role of the Holy Spirit in this text. What do we learn from this?

3. Based on our study of the Gospel of Mark previously and this study of Acts, often the most outspoken opposition to the truth of the gospel comes from highly religious people. Does this seem to ring true in your own experience?

Given the emphasis on the word of God in this text, what is the key question we must continually ask religious people when discussing the gospel?

4. What do we learn about some people according to Paul's warning in Acts 13:40, 41?

What is Paul's conclusion about these people in Acts 13:46? What does he mean? (Compare with 2 Corinthians 4:3, 4.)

5. What do we learn about those who believed in Acts 13:48?

In this text we have the tension between our call to do the work God has called us to (13:2) with people exercising their will to choose (13:46) and God's divine "appointment" or election to salvation (13:48). What is God's part and what is our part in accomplishing the mission?

6. How do you explain the disciples' reaction in Acts 13:52 given the circumstances of what transpired in Pisidian?

Would some consider what happened there a failure?

How does this help put our experiences in witnessing in perspective?

Application

1. In thinking about our call to be witnesses, list five key principles about witnessing from this text.
2. What is the most important thing you personally need to remember from this text concerning our call to be witnesses?
3. Pray for those unbelievers around you that God would lead you to share the right message at the right time.
4. As we head into Easter, begin to pray about those God would have you invite to Easter services and the four weeks following Easter targeting the spiritual seekers around us. Invitations will be available for you to hand deliver to those you want to invite.