

Occupation

(Acts Session 22—August 30, 2026)

Acts 13:4-8

4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

5 And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as *their* assistant.

6 Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus,

7 who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, ***an intelligent man***. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.

8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.

So up to this point, Barnabas and Saul know that the Holy Spirit has called them to leave Antioch, and take the message of Christ to the Gentiles. But that's all they know. They have not been told to go in a specific direction or to a specific place.

Which brings up a practical point to consider, for anyone who would seek to be led by the Spirit. And as Bible-believing Christians, I trust we all fit into that category. But perhaps this is something new to you. So let me encourage you to ***make a point of asking for the Holy Spirit's direction in your life***.

It is in fact a privilege that is offered to every believer. It is part and parcel of being born again through faith in Christ. And being led by the Spirit will play a significant role in your personal experience of spiritual growth.

Romans 8:12-14

12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.

13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

Catch that little phrase right there in the middle of vs. 13. ***By the Spirit. By the Spirit.*** That is how the Christian life is meant to be lived, and the sooner we learn that the easier things are.

But getting back to Barnabas and Saul, at this juncture it seems that the most important thing for them was to just get moving. They were told to go. Not where to go, just to go.

I'm reminded of a familiar logo, which I have slightly modified for this sermon.



That's how the adventure begins. Start moving forward. Do something somewhere for the Kingdom of God.

Doesn't matter so much exactly where or even what, when you're just learning the ropes. Just do ***something***.

I remember Abraham. He's called the father of our faith for a reason. And this concept of forward movement was there right at the beginning of Abraham's story.

Just listen to how he gets introduced in Fatih's ***Hall of Fame***—otherwise known as **Hebrews chapter 11**.

Hebrews 11:8

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an

inheritance. *And he went out, not knowing where he was going.*

He didn't know where he was going, but he knew it was time to be on the move. And forward movement was a prerequisite for receiving further guidance from God. One step at a time.

So getting back to Barnabas and Saul—they caught a ship, and sailed off to the island of Cyprus.

And I think there was a reason they chose Cyprus for a starting point. Cyprus is where Barnabas was from. We're told that back in **chapter 4**.

They start out by speaking in some of the synagogues in the town of Salamis, and then Luke points out the first time they share their faith directly with a Gentile.

He's a man named Sergius Paulus, who also happened to be the governor of Cyprus.

But there was an evil person lurking in the background. A Jewish practitioner of the dark arts. Elymas by name, who viewed Barnabas and Saul as a threat to his position of influence. So he and starts to contradict whatever they were saying. And it is right here that a significant turning point takes place in the narrative.

Acts 13:9-12

9 Then Saul, who also *is called* Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him
10 and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, *you* enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?"

11 And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord *is* upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time." And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand.

12 Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

Several things of note have just occurred. First of all, Luke informs us in **vs. 9** that Saul's name has been changed to Paul. I'm glad we're at this point, because I get tired of feeling like I have to explain that Saul is Paul and vice versa. From now on, thankfully, it's just Paul.

And while this conflict was unfolding, the governor— or as Luke calls him the Proconsul— was there witnessing the whole thing, and on the spot committed himself to Jesus. And his reaction brings up a very interesting point for us to consider. Look once more at **vs. 12**:

Acts 13:12

*"Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at **the teaching of the Lord.**"*

Luke presents the miracle that Paul had just performed as being part of ***the teaching of the Lord.***

And that tells us something important: The teaching of the Lord must not be confined to intellectual concepts alone. It is natural for the message of the gospel to be attended by spiritual events and manifestations of God's presence and power.

In our day and age it is perhaps more comfortable to just limit ourselves to the intellectual aspects of the gospel, and leave it at that.

But is that the way God intended things to be? What about the experiential aspects of our religion? Certainly the pattern laid out for us in the New Testament embraces both the intellectual and experiential aspects of the faith. Paul certainly made that plain enough in his approach to ministry.

I Thessalonians 1:5

For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.

Now in this verse, he doesn't seem to be describing miracles. He's not talking about the signs and wonders. He's saying that along with the preaching and teaching that occurred, something was encountered that transcended the intellect alone. And it left the congregation with a lingering sense assurance. Paul attributed the whole thing to the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Church in Paul's view was—for want of a better term—not a just a time of songs and a Bible lesson. It was **a spiritual experience**. It went far beyond the mere impartation of religious information.

What Luke points out in verse 12 is very simple: the teaching of the Lord involves more than just religious verbiage. It should be a spiritual event.

And then we see a recurring phrase popping up once again. This phrase is peppered all throughout the book of Acts, and we've considered it a few times already in this series.

When anything gets repeated this often and this consistently in Scripture, it demands our attention.

The phrase I speak of occurs at the middle of **verse 9**:

Acts 13:9

Then Saul, who also is called Paul, **filled with the Holy Spirit**, looked intently at him.

So we have to ask: ***Is this just an incidental comment, or is Luke making a point here?***

We have already been informed that Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit back during the events

that occurred in chapter 9. Is Luke simply reminding us of that fact here in chapter 13? Or is he trying to help us understand something about Paul's experience of the Holy Spirit that is in addition to what happened to him in chapter 9? I think that is the case.

So let me give you my take on what is happening here, and why it is relevant to us today. I believe there can be—no, I believe there should be renewed fillings of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers.

This phrase—when it occurs—is describing fresh experiences, occurring spontaneously. These are not mere references to past history.

In other words, something happened to Paul at this specific point in time. He was filled again with the Holy Spirit. Not re-baptized in the Holy Spirit. But filled to overflowing, and for a purpose.

And if that is the case, what exactly are we to make of it? Just this—God spontaneously empowers people to accomplish specific works for Him. Paul was empowered—on the spot—to counteract the interference of this evil man. And as a result, the governor believed and gave his life to Jesus.

There will be many occasions in the life of a Christian when such fillings of the Holy Spirit are needed. This should come as no surprise to us, for Jesus foretold it.

John 7:37-39

37 On the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.

38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

39 But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

We must pay close attention to the direction that things are moving in this passage. Jesus begins by describing something that comes into a person.

Come to Me and drink.

That's speaking of input. Oh, but He doesn't stop there. There is also output. Something that flows out to others.

Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.

These fresh infillings of the Holy Spirit occur in part so that God's grace and power may flow through a believer's life, in order to impact others with the power of the gospel.

Let's read on.

Acts 13:13-15

13 Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.

14 But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down.

15 And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, "Men *and* brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on."

So they end up in another city by the name of Antioch. Only this time it's Antioch of Pisidia instead of Antioch of Syria.

And at this point, Paul preaches a sermon. In the interest of maintaining our train of thought this morning, I'd like us to jump down to **verse 38**, where Paul begins to apply the sermon to their lives. Perhaps we can just figure on reading Paul's sermon later today at home.

Acts 13:38-39

38 Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins;

39 and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.

Understand, Paul is speaking to religious individuals here. But they had never really experienced what it means to have true forgiveness for their sins.

Forgiveness—actually justification—could not be found in the way they were pursuing it.

Paul knows very well where these Jewish brothers are coming from. It's exactly where he was, before he encountered Jesus on the Road to Damascus.

Like every serious Jew, they were all trying to be right with God by observing the law of Moses. Paul knew from his own experience that none of them were succeeding.

And so he gives them the great good news of being justified through faith in Christ alone.

Acts 13:39

And by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.

But there was also a layer of stubborn pride that some of these men were struggling with. They wouldn't want to admit they've had it all wrong. They wouldn't want to think that all of their religious activities up to this point have been in vain. So Paul seems compelled to finish his sermon with a stern warning:

Acts 13:40-41

40 Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you:

41 'Behold, you despisers, Marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, a work which you will

by no means believe, though one were to declare it to you.’

No doubt these Jewish brothers ended up in deep thought after hearing Paul’s message. Some of them would come into the light as a result. Some of them would choose to remain in darkness.

But there were Gentiles who were in attendance at that service, and their reaction seemed to be universally positive.

Acts 13:42-43

42 So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.

43 Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

Many of the Jews were positive as well. And there were instructions that Paul and Barnabas gave them after the service was over. It was the same for both Jew and Gentile:

Continue in the grace of God.

That’s such a simple thing, wouldn’t you agree? That’s really all it takes. Continue responding, continue following, continue embracing the grace of God. Grace for forgiveness. Grace to live right. Grace to make the difficult decisions and make changes that are necessary. Grace involves a lot of homework.

Titus 2:11-12

11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,

12 teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age,

13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Short version, be where you’re supposed to be, do what you’re supposed to do, and always keep your eyes peeled for Jesus’ promised return.

The grace of God teaches a whole new lifestyle, a whole new way of looking at the world, according to that passage.

But as I said earlier, there were others who didn’t react so positively.

Acts 13:44-47

44 On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God.

45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming,

46 Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.

47 For so the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.’ ”

Did Paul stop reaching out to the Jews at this point? No, it’s just that this is where a significant change of directions occurs, This is where the primary focus of Paul’s ministry actually shifts to reaching the Gentiles.

Acts 13:48-49

48 Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

49 And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region.

Do you understand what happened there in **verse 48**? Every one who was appointed to eternal life—which is to say every chosen one who was there—came to faith at that precise moment. Now don’t take this any further than Luke intended.

He's not teaching anything about the mechanics behind their appointment to eternal life. He's just saying that they were, indeed, appointed. Chosen. And that they all came to faith at that moment.

By definition, anyone who gets saved has been appointed to eternal life. Salvation is a work of God, and it has its origins in eternity past. These are the doctrines of election and predestination.

But the Bible never, ever presents the mechanics of election or predestination as mere fatalism.

You've heard the story about the fatalist, haven't you? A man trips at the top of a long stairway and tumbles headlong to the bottom. And then he stands up and brushes himself off, and says, *"Whew! I'm glad that's over."*

Fatalism is the belief that all events are predetermined and cannot be changed by human actions. He was going to fall down that flight of stairs one way or another.

No, that's not how it works. Over and over again the Bible urges all people to choose. To yield to the influence of the Holy Spirit and surrender our life to Christ. No one is locked out.

There is no exclusivity in the offer. It says, *"Whosoever will, let him come."*

And as far as God's attitude about this subject goes, just give this a listen:

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, *not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.*

The offer is freely made to any and all who will respond.

Isaiah 45:22

"Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other."

And so instead of letting a verse like Acts 13:48 trouble your hearts, recognize the amazing message that is in there for you as a believer. It is a part of God's love letter to you.

If you've received Jesus, that means you have been appointed to eternal life. Don't torment yourself wondering, *"Am I really saved?"*

Instead, just recall the words of the Apostle John.

1 John 5:11-13a

11 And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.

12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life...

Instead of nervously rushing past them, you can actually begin to savor all of those verses about election and predestination, because they proclaim the assurance that is yours as a believer in Christ.

Philippians 1:6

Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

So quit being so neurotic about these things. How this puzzle fits together is above our pay grade, and none of us really understand the mechanics of it.

But this teaching is food for your soul. It is the proclamation of grace. Grace has been given you to be a child of God—as elect, and as chosen as the Apostle Paul himself.

Don't let the devil tie you up in theological knots when it's as plain as day in God's Word that God has ***always*** wanted you to be one of His born-again children. Rejoice in that, my Christian friend.

And if you haven't taken Jesus up on His offer yet, what in the world are you waiting for? Give your life to Him today. He will not turn you away.

John 6:37b

...the one who comes to Me I will ^[f]by no means cast out.

Acts 13:50-51

50 But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.

51 But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium.

Why did they stir up the women? And how did they go about it? We're not given any insight into that. But this passage certainly indicates that the devil will work through specific groups of people to try and hinder the gospel. This time he used the prominent religious women of the city.

Paul and Barnabas didn't plead with them to reconsider the ban. They just left town and went to Iconium, where they hoped people would be more receptive.

Acts 13:52

And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Which disciples? The ones in Antioch, or the ones in Iconium?

We're not told, but here once again we have come across that recurring phrase. ***They were filled...with the Holy Spirit.***

I don't know about you, but I can't help but be intrigued by this. This is happening too often to

ignore. Luke seems to be intent on presenting this as something normal; something to be expected within the early church.

Please notice that this time around the filling with the Spirit isn't connected with any description of evangelistic work. Nor is there any mention of a miracle. There's not even a sermon being preached.

Luke simply point out that the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Spirit.

Once again, I have to ask a question: ***Is this something we should anticipate in modern-day Christianity?***

Well, I'll have us ponder that thought over the coming days. For the remainder of our time this morning, let's focus on our homework for the coming week.

A key concept has been identified this morning: the need for forward movement in the life of average Christians.

If there isn't any of that currently going on in your life, today would be a wonderful time to start thinking in those terms.

What God has been working up to in your life is to get you committed at the point of your spiritual gifts, whatever they might be.

And the only way to discover what they are is to get involved. And getting involved is a type of forward movement.

On the other hand, you don't actually have to take any of this to heart. You can remain stationary. That way you never have to risk embarrassment or anxiety. You can stay safe.

Safe—and bored.

You've heard of being born again. Too many Christians are bored again.

And it's a downright shame for any Christian to become bored with their spiritual life, because it is so unnecessary.

You have to make a conscious effort to start moving forward. Find a place where you can make a difference. The Spirit's leading will come to you in that context. And when the Spirit leads, that's when the good stuff happens.

Alright—two minutes more and we're done. I haven't made any mention of the keyword for this morning. It's the one that sort of encapsulates the emphasis for the day, and most often is the title for the sermon.

Today's keyword comes from one of Jesus' parables, taken from the King James version.

Luke 19:13^b KJV
...Occupy till I come.

The key word for today is "**Occupation**". To loosely quote the words of Jesus, "***It's time to be occupied with your Father's business.***"

And just to clarify: when I speak of forward motion, we're not just going through the motions.

Instead of reluctantly doing your duty and checking off boxes, make a point of seeking Him and serving Him intensely from the heart.

Here's a practical way to begin. When you do WordWalk, don't settle for just reading the chapters and nothing more.

From now on, whenever you study the Scriptures, make a point of asking the Holy Spirit to speak into your life through the Word. Take the same approach with your prayers.

You're not just fulfilling a religious duty. You are seeking Him, with an expectation of actually hearing back from Him.

That is how it works. In a daily, incremental fashion—direction will begin to come your way. It's like I heard someone say a long time ago—***The will of God grows on you.***

There is much more of God that we will experience, if these things are taken to heart.

Why settle for an intellectual faith and nothing beyond that? Paul didn't. The early church didn't. And neither should we. We don't have to.

After all, He keeps reminding us of that. Every time we come across that recurring phrase, we are reminded; fresh infillings of the Holy Spirit are for modern Christians as well.