

Antioch Sends The Gospel to Cyprus

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 May 2016

Preacher: Jon Hueni

[0:00] Acts chapter 13. Acts chapter 13. We'll be reading the first 12 verses. And so after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues.

John was with them as their helper. They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and a false prophet named Bar-Jesus, who was an attendant of the procuracy Sergius Paulus.

The procuracy, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. But Elemas, the sorcerer, for that is what his name means, opposed them and tried to turn the procuracy from the faith.

Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elemas and said, You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right.

[1:45] You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun.

And immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about seeking someone to lead him by the hand. And when the procuracy saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

The Lord Jesus Christ promised to build his church and to do it from all nations, peoples, and languages. And he would use that little church in Jerusalem to start that whole process.

You remember he told them that you will be my witnesses, but only after having received the Holy Spirit. And you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and then in all Judea and Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth.

Now, that verse becomes the table of contents for the book of Acts. And we see the gospel radiating out from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

[3:04] Let's say you're at Dan and Jody's pond, and there's a rock there. I don't know if they allow this, but you take that rock and you chuck it out into the middle of the pond.

What happens? Kerplunk. There's this huge splash. That's the main event in the book of Acts, illustrated in that. The coming of the Holy Spirit upon his church, Acts chapter 2.

What happens after that? Well, waves go out from that position. And that's what happened. And all throughout Jerusalem, the good news was spoken and preached, and they filled Jerusalem with their doctrine.

And then some persecution came, and everyone but the apostles fled Jerusalem and went on out to Judea and Samaria.

Because the waves just keep working out, don't they, from the center where the rock splashed. And that's what happened next. And people are going throughout Palestine, Judea and Samaria, with the gospel.

[4:14] Oh, but the command was to the ends of the earth. And we haven't seen it go that far yet, outside of Palestine, to the ends of the earth.

Well, that's what we're beginning to see. We're seeing that God is now moving the gospel even further than just Judea, all Judea and Samaria.

And this is still our mandate, to take it to the ends of the earth. It's reached us. It's to continue to be going out here and around the world. The first lesson, then, with regard to missions, is that the Lord sovereignly prepares both the mission field and the missionaries.

The ancient world was made up of many little nation states and people groups that were often warring against one another and had their own language.

So God started to prepare the world for his gospel. And he used even the kings and rulers of men. He makes even the wrath of men to praise him.

[5:21] And so he established a universal language. It would be through Alexander the Great, that power-hungry man, that conquered the then known world and made Greek the universal language of the world.

So that now, a missionary knowing Greek can go into all these places, many nations, and have his gospel understood. God was preparing the field.

Not only with the language, but with a widespread peace. Because Rome, conquering the then known world, established a peace and kept a peace by their armies.

And so it was safe for missionaries to move around in the whole world because of the Roman peace. And wherever Rome went with her armies, they made roads to travel on.

But that also enabled missionaries to travel. Little did Rome know that as they built their roads, it was not only for the easy movement of their Roman soldiers, but also for the soldiers of the cross, to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

[6:38] And then, thirdly, God was preparing the world for his missionaries by the institution of Jewish synagogues. This goes back five, six hundred years earlier, when the Babylonians came and captured the Jews there in Palestine, and shipped them out all over the world.

Well, being cut off from the temple, where do they worship? They established synagogues, local places of worship, where they would read and have preaching on the Old Testament scriptures.

So as Paul traveled among the nations of the world, what did he find? He found these synagogues, Jewish synagogues. And there he found a people who recognized the Old Testament scriptures as the word of God.

And so that was his method. He would go there first, to the Jew first, and then also to the Gentile. God was preparing the world for his gospel by one universal language, by a great peace and road system, and by these Jewish synagogues.

Now, God not only prepared the mission field, he prepared the missionaries. And we've seen that with Saul of Tarsus. He didn't find him in mission school.

[7:56] He found him breathing out slaughter on the road to Damascus. And God saved him. Jesus met him and made him a new creature in Christ Jesus. And he had already been brought up in the Old Testament scriptures in Gamaliel's school in Jerusalem.

So he had all of the knowledge. And now that he had Christ, he had the key to the scriptures. And so whenever he would come to a synagogue, he was able to take the Old Testament scriptures and prove that Jesus is the long-expected Messiah.

God prepared his missionary for a prepared mission field. We've seen that with Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, how God prepared them for each other. We've seen it with Peter and Cornelius, God preparing the one for the other.

And so here, in this mission work that is now going forth from the church at Antioch, we see two missionaries and their helper, Barnabas and Paul, heading out into a mission field that God has sovereignly prepared.

Well, that's true, too, wherever you go, isn't it? God is the one who goes before us. Now, the second lesson this morning is that missions is the work of local churches.

[9 : 11] And we see that so plainly. Missionaries are called from local churches. They're sent out from the church. And they report back to the church. And now we're looking at this church in Antioch.

We remember how it was planted. But some scattered by the persecution made their way all the way up to Antioch of Syria. And some of them started to give the gospel to Gentiles in Antioch.

And many believed. And Barnabas was sent from Jerusalem to check it out. And he rejoiced in what he saw and sent for Saul to come and help him. And for a whole year, they worked together teaching the word of God to this church at Antioch.

Antioch. Well, that church, three years later, goes from being a daughter church to being a mother church.

Goes from being a church plant to sending church planting missionaries to plant other churches. And it, this church at Antioch, would soon be an important center of Christianity, second only to the church in Jerusalem.

[10 : 21] Now, we're just given this brief glance, a few verses here, as the chapter begins. And what we find is this is a healthy church. Just note these marks of a healthy church.

They're a worshiping church. We see that in verse 2. The Lord Jesus had their hearts, as we just heard. And so they loved to worship him. It was a Bible-centered church where God's word was taught.

They had these five distinguished teachers of that word. They're given for us. They were serious about teaching disciples to know God's word, to obey everything that Jesus commanded.

They were a mission-minded church. Someone had brought the gospel to them. Now they wanted to send it on out to others. And so they had this heart to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

And they were praying in a fasting church. Robertson says they were facing a great emergency in giving the gospel to the Gentile world.

[11 : 25] That's no easy task, to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. And they wanted God's blessing upon their work to reach the lost.

So they prayed. And they were desperate for God's blessing. So they fasted. They were a praying and a fasting church.

And lastly, they were a sacrificial church. They gave up two of their best teachers, Barnabas and Saul, to go and to take the glorious riches of Christ to the ends of the earth.

Now, we notice that there's such a thing as a special call to missionary work. We all are called to be Christ's witnesses.

You are the light of the world. The world has no other light, so don't hide it. Let it shine to all within your influence. But knowing that, there is a special call for some to be set apart from anything else that they do that they might go and evangelize and plant churches.

[12 : 32] And that's what we find here. Here, set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. So there is a special call to missionary work.

And secondly, it's God himself who calls and sends his workers. It was the Holy Spirit who said, out of these teachers and preachers, these are the ones I want. And then the church sent them on their way.

It's a strange interplay here. Who was it that sent Barnabas and Saul? Well, verse 3 says the church sent them off.

And verse 4 says the two of them sent on their way by the Holy Spirit. So which was it, the Holy Spirit or the church that sent them? Well, it was both. It was the Holy Spirit through the church.

And that's still his way of working. The Holy Spirit no longer speaks through prophets directly revealing the word of God from God to us. We now have the scriptures and list of qualifications.

[13:38] And as the church prays and seeks the Lord and sees what kind of men God wants to be going, then there is this awareness.

This one is to be sent. The Holy Spirit makes it plain to the church. And the Spirit sends them. And the church sends them. And so Paul and Barnabas and their helper, John Mark, are sent by the Spirit and by the church.

Grace Fellowship Church. This is a three-year-old church then, sending missionaries. We've existed for 33 years. May we be praying for the Lord of the Harvest to send out workers.

Why should we not be like Antioch, sending those to take the good news to the ends of the earth? Well, the first missionary journey then took around a year and a half.

And this morning we follow Barnabas and Paul on their first leg of their journey. Their first destination is the island of Cyprus. So from Antioch they would have gone 16 miles to the seaport town to catch a boat to Cyprus, 130 miles out in the Mediterranean Sea.

[15:01] The island was dedicated to the fertility goddess Venus. And so it was full of immorality that was encouraged by her worship.

The island was home to many Jews as well. In fact, this is where Barnabas was from. This is his homeland, the island of Cyprus. And so it's natural that he would want to take the gospel first to his own homeland.

And that's where they first go. They landed on the eastern coastline and they worked their way to the western coast. And we'll notice their methodology, their message, and then a sampling of their work.

First, their methodology. The first city they came to was Salamis. And it was home to a large settlement of Jews. So much so that we read that there was more than one synagogue there.

They proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues, plural. That's their methodology, you see. They went to the synagogue and proclaimed the gospel to Jew first.

[16:10] And then as well to the Gentile. Their message, they proclaimed the word of God. They didn't go sharing their own ideas. They didn't go with suggestions. They went with a, thus saith the Lord.

The most important thing our world needs to hear is not what I think or you think, but what God thinks, what God has said. And that's what they were sent to do. Now, missionaries may do many other things.

And there might be support ministries and compassion ministries. But they are always to be linked to the word of God being preached and proclaimed.

That's what saves people eternally from hell to heaven. It's the message. It's a message of words. And that's what the work of missions is. It's to make known the gospel, the word of God about his son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it's as that message is heard and believed and obeyed that people are saved for eternity. Well, we come then to a sampling of their work.

[17:16] And I wanted to make this a point of its own for it takes up the rest of our time. And indeed, it takes up the greater portion of our text, doesn't it? This sampling we get of their work.

So they've made their way the 90 miles across the island. And now they're on the western coast, the city of Paphos. Most likely they preached all the way.

And now here they've come to Paphos. It's the capital and seat of government. Here a man named Sergius Paulus was the proconsul, the governor, the deputy. He ruled the island for the Roman Empire.

And we're told he was an intelligent man. Isn't that interesting? But even men with high IQs can be deceived and led astray, even as Sergius Paulus was being led astray by one of his own court attendants named Bargesus, also called Elemas.

Now here's the fact sheet on Elemas. He was a Jew. Already we've noted that there were many Jews on this island. He probably had some knowledge then of the Old Testament scriptures.

[18:30] We're also told he's a sorcerer. In fact, Elemas means sorcerer. And so he would have used magical arts that were usually associated with occultism.

He would be in league with the devil, using demonic powers with his magic to cast spells on others, to supposedly know the future, to secure blessing, to protect, to give wisdom in making decisions.

He was a sorcerer. He was also a false prophet. Now a false prophet was one who pretended to speak for God, but what came out of his mouths were only lies, dressed up like God's truth, but really were lies.

And so his magical powers would have convinced people that this indeed is the truth. And he wowed them with his power. And evidently it was quite convincing for the intelligence.

Sergius Paulus had him as an advisor in his own court. A counselor. Well, when Barnabas and Saul got to town, they did what they always did.

[19:44] They proclaimed the word of God. And Sergius Paulus heard about it and invited them to come and preach to him. He wanted to hear the word of God.

But we're told, Elemas the sorcerer opposed him and tried to turn the pro council from the faith. Elemas is fighting for his job.

He's fighting for his influence, you see, with the governor. His job's clearly in jeopardy, for if the pro council believes the truth of God's word, well then the lies of Elemas are exposed for what they are, and he is no longer needed.

His services are no longer wanted. So he does everything he can trying to turn the pro council from the faith. So you got the picture?

There's Barnabas and Paul, and they're speaking the word of God. And Sergius Paulus is listening. And there at his side is Elemas. And he's trying to divert him.

[20:44] That's what the word means, to turn him from the faith, to divert him from the faith, raising objections, twisting their words to make them look foolish.

And so this goes on for a while, and then Paul stops, and he looks right at Elemas. And what he does may cause you to wonder whether Paul just lost his temper and just took matters into his hands, got fed up and just read him the riot act.

But Luke senses that we might think that. And so he assures us that what Paul did was what he did filled with the Holy Spirit.

Before he tells us what Paul said and did, he said, but Paul filled with the Holy Spirit. There was nothing unholy about what he did.

It was a controlled response prompted by the Holy Spirit, empowering Paul to speak and act as he did.

[21:55] So Paul first described Elemas in his true character, and secondly, he pronounced God's judgment on him, which was immediately carried out. Now he first describes Elemas and his heart, the true character of the man.

Who can do that? Can Paul? Does he know the hearts of a man? No. But the Holy Spirit can, and Paul spoke with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God knows people better than they know themselves.

Paul filled with the Spirit, looked straight at Elemas and said, you are a child of the devil. Those are sharp words, but they were true words. Because like Father, like Son, you bear the likeness of the devil, for you are an enemy of everything that is right.

Isn't that the devil? Was there ever one thing that was right that he was for? No. He's against everything that is right. Is God for it?

I'm against it. That's the devil. He is anti-God, anti-Christ, always against what is right. And just like him, is this Elemas, this sorcerer and false prophet.

[23:16] Furthermore, you are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Just like the devil, that old deceiver. He is a liar and the father of lies.

And you're carrying out your father's desire. You're doing his work for him, deceiving Sergius Paulus, trying to trick the proconsul from the truth.

And so comes the clinching question, will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? You know, that's what the devil's doing.

He's not original. He always takes what the Lord says and then puts his twist on it. The Lord says to Eve, the first words spoken back in Genesis 3, you can read them.

And the Lord says, in the day you eat of it, you will surely die. And the devil takes his words and says, you will not surely die. He just puts a twist on it, his own spin on it, to make it say something opposite of what it meant.

[24:19] That's the devil. He takes what is holy and true and pure and he perverts it. He twists it. There's not a good thing in the universe that Satan would not twist and pervert.

And we see it in the world we live in. And that's what Elemas is doing. He's a child of the devil doing his work, trying to divert the proconsul and keep him from believing the gospel and being saved.

Well, then Paul pronounces God's judgment on him. He says, Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You're going to be blind and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun.

Now that's not just legally blind, that's blind blind. You can't see the light of the sun. Now, can Paul speak and have people struck with blindness?

Does he have such powers? No. Again, we're seeing that what he now does, just as what he said, is by the power of the Holy Spirit. It was the Lord's own hand.

[25:32] You see that? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. It was the Lord's own hand, the Lord Jesus' hand from heaven that struck this man with blindness. Do you remember him doing so with anyone else?

Was it not Saul of Tarsus that met the Lord Jesus and was struck with blindness on the road to Damascus? And it seemed to be the Lord's hand in that it immediately happened, such that darkness came over him and he groped about, looking for someone to lead him by the hand.

Now, this judgment was most fitting, wasn't it, as God's judgments are? Sometimes we see the connections more clearly than others, saying this is an easy one.

What was he trying to do to Sergius Paulus? He was trying to blind the proconsul to the truth that was being preached to him. And so he himself is blinded.

But there was mercy in this judgment, wasn't there? I mean, he could have been struck dead and damned rather than blinded. That's what he deserved for doing the devil's work.

[26 : 50] He could have been struck permanently blind, but we're told it was only for a time. That's mercy. And this temporary judgment was a warning of eternal judgments to come.

And oh, is that ever a mercy, to be put on notice that this God that you are sinning against and who sees what you do to his word, he's coming in judgment.

And just that you might know that for sure, you're going to be blind for a while. And he's blind. What a warning. What a blessing shot across the bow of Elymus as he's making his way through life to the judgment seat of Christ.

And he's reminded there is a God I must answer to. What a mercy to be warned. It would have been far worse to receive no warning of worse judgments to come for Elymus just to have been left alone, to go on perverting the right ways of the Lord and to go on doing all that he was doing and then to suddenly face the judge at the end and find himself damned.

I say it's a far worse judgment of God to be left alone than it is to be judged with a temporal judgment. Ephraim is joined to his idols.

[28 : 18] Leave him alone. Now that's a far worse judgment just to be left alone with our idols. No, this man is warned.

He's got a temporal judgment that warns him of a greater judgment to come. You know, Paul himself, as I said, had the same thing happen to him.

He's slaughtering Christians and he's on his way to do the same in Damascus and Christ stands in his path and he strikes him with blindness.

Do you know Saul of Tarsus never saw things more clearly than when he was struck blind temporarily? That could be a mercy to Elymus too that during this blindness he would start to see the most important things of life.

God, his eternal soul and what he's doing with his word and with his gospel and with his Christ. It was a mercy to have this temporary blindness.

[29 : 20] Some of you can testify that you too are heading down the fast lane to hell on the broad road to judgment, to destruction and God interrupted your life with a temporal judgment where you were backed into a corner, you were confronted with a problem you could not weasel out of, you were brought to an end of your good times and you were up to your chin in trouble and God got you thinking, didn't he?

he used a temporal judgment to work a merciful end. He awakened you to your sin and your need of a savior. He awakened you to the reality of judgment and you who had been content to live without Christ for many, many years perhaps suddenly could not live without him any longer and you cried to him for mercy and he heard you and he had mercy on you and to this day you thank God for that temporal judgment that he brought in your life because it sent you to Jesus who saves us from the coming wrath.

Blessed be God for his temporal judgments but they're warnings, they're warnings. Be sure you heed them and we don't know whether Elymus heeded this rebuke or remained stiff-necked but we do know this that a man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy.

Proverbs 29.1 and we do know that when the proconsul saw what had happened he believed for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

You see with diversions gone with Elemus out of the way he believed the word of God because he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

[31 : 30] His eyes locked on the Lord Jesus and he trusted in him for his salvation. You know this message about the Lord Jesus is the power of God for salvation to anyone who believes to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

And here's the Jew Elemus the sorcerer and he doesn't believe at least not yet and here's the Gentile Sergius Paulus and he does believe and receives everlasting life.

even this pagan procouncil on the island of Cyprus believes on the Lord Jesus. Have you trusted yourself? Lock, stock and barrel to the Lord Jesus just thrown yourself into his arms and said take me Jesus have mercy on me.

His promise is sure let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts let him turn to the Lord and he will have mercy on him and to our God for he will freely pardon.

He believed for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord. You amazed at the teaching about the Lord? That he who is God would come to earth and become a man that he might take the punishment that we rebels!

[32 : 57] We lawbreakers! We God haters! We self lovers over God lovers that we deserved! That he would come and take that and pay the price completely for our sins and then rise from the dead victorious over it and descend into heaven and now to watch over us from are you amazed at the words about the Lord?

What the Lord Jesus has done? Does it amaze you? Or are you so hardened in heart that it's become old hat that's become ho-hum what's for lunch?

That's a hard heart. But I'm inviting you to go to him with your hard heart just as you are to take your hard heart and confess it to Jesus and tell him what you are and to cry for his mercy.

Lord Jesus give me a new heart. This heart is so hardened I am not amazed at the gospel. I need to be amazed at my sin at your grace at the wonders of what you have done for sinners that you promised to turn none who come away.

Don't wait till you're better. Take your hard heart to Jesus. Do you wait until you're better before you go to the doctor? I'm going to wait to see my temperature drop a few degrees before I go.

[34 : 23] Or isn't that why the doctor exists for those who are really sick? Well then why don't you go just as you are with your sin sick heart and go to Jesus the great physician and ask him to have mercy on you and heal you from your waywardness and to love you freely.

Do you wait till you're a little cleaner before you take a shower? Fellas, you come home all grimy at the end of the day. You say, I'm going to wait before I take a shower. I need to get a little cleaner before I go.

Or is that not why the shower exists? Then why don't you just run at once filthy, vile, helpless wee and run to the fountain that's open for sin and uncleanness and ask Jesus, wash me, Jesus, or I die.

Cleanse me of my sin. Don't try to save yourself before coming to the Savior. You don't try to heal yourself before going to the doctor. You don't try to cleanse yourself before going to the shower.

Don't try to save yourself to get better before you come to the Savior. If you tarry till you're better, you will never come at all. Not the righteous. Not the righteous.

[35 : 35] Sinners. Dirty, sin-sick, filthy sinners. Jesus came to call. None but Jesus can do helpless sinners good.

good. Well, the gospel, it's an amazing message, isn't it? Three closing lessons and we're done. First of all, from this one sample given on the island of Cyprus, what do we see?

Well, we see what we've seen everywhere in the book of Acts so far. We see Jesus is building his church. We see all hell opposing him. And then we see Jesus victorious over hell's opposition.

That the gates of hell cannot withstand the onslaught of the gospel chariot. Setting captives free from Satan's prison house of sin.

Freeing them from his lies and his lusts that held them in bondage. For if the Son will set you free, you will be free indeed. And that's what we see.

[36 : 41] Jesus building Satan opposing. Here he's using Elemas. But we see Christ, the Lord, coming with his hand and bringing salvation to one and judgment to another.

But a judgment mixed with mercy. Two men, both in spiritual darkness before the coming of Barnabas and Saul with the gospel.

One man opposed and judged because of it. One man believed on Christ, though not without a spiritual fight for his soul. I think we're led into something of the spiritual warfare that goes on for the souls of men.

Amen. Pilgrim, as he set his face towards celestial city in the Bunyan's pilgrim's progress.

He's fleeing the city of destruction and he meets opposition. But when he comes to the gate of conversion to Christ, it was then that the man who lived across the way let fly his arrows thick as hail against any pilgrim to divert them from entering in the gate of conversion to Christ.

[38 : 10] Let somebody, some slave of Satan, some child of the devil, which we all are by birth, begin to set themselves in earnest to entering into the gate of Christ, coming to Christ the door, and they will meet a fight of their life, temptation, a war in their spirit, demons let loose from hell to keep you from coming to Jesus.

Well, one believed, the other didn't. You know, there's another story in this chapter about two boys. Here's two men. There's two other men.

And what we see is just a parenthesis in verse one, the last part, when we're told about the five teachers and prophets there in the church in Antioch, there's this name, Menaion, listed.

And there's just a parenthesis behind him, Menaion, who had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch. Wow. What a lesson is found inside this parenthesis.

Here's two boys. The ages of some of you boys here today. Two boys, close friends, they grew up together, perhaps in the same court.

[39 : 37] They played together, they studied together. One grew up to be the godless ruler, Herod Antipas, who unlawfully married his brother Philip's wife, and then beheaded John the Baptist for reproving him for his sin, and later had the Son of God standing before his court in trial, and he made sport of Jesus Christ.

So, you're the king of the Jews, you need to look like a king, and he dressed him up with a purple robe, and he was mad that Jesus wouldn't answer his questions, and he mocked his kingly claim, and he sent him back to Pilate, dressed up like a king.

That's the one boy. Herod Antipas. The other boy, Menaean, grew up right alongside him, but he trusted in the Lord Jesus as his savior and king.

He did own him as the king, as the savior, and he went on to be one of the leaders of this church at Antioch that spread the fame of Jesus all over the world through its missionaries that it sent out to the ends of the earth.

Two boys, same upbringing, two different responses to Jesus Christ, and two completely different destinies.

[41:07] Which boy are you like? Which boy are you like this morning? Some of you have had brothers and sisters and close friends that you grew up with, maybe in the same home, same environment, maybe the same church, maybe they were baptized in the same baptismal tank of you, so many similarities, but oh, what a difference for this morning finds you in the house of God with a love for Jesus Christ and a trust in him to save you.

And your brother, sister, dear friend is far from the Lord, seeking their own way, not his. grace, under his wrath and condemnation, on their way to hell, if not already there.

What made the difference? Were you smarter? Were you the smarter of the two boys? Were you wiser? Were you better? Oh, no, bow down and worship God for his sovereign, distinguishing, amazing grace.

Who made you to differ from another? And what do you have that you have not received? Come on, what faith do you have that you've not received?

What repentance do you have that you've not received? What love for Jesus? Oh, it's because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, we're told.

[42:39] God's grace that chose you and sought you and found you and drew you to the Lord Jesus and powerfully overcame every obstacle that Satan put in your way.

Bow and worship, worship, adore him. But I wonder, can you not see in our text this morning Satan's hateful nature?

Do you know he wants you in hell with him? If he's to be damned, he wants you damned with him. And therefore he spares no pains to divert you from taking the word of God seriously.

he may not even mind if you come to church and hear it. Just as long as you don't do it.

Remember in Jesus' parable, he's the bird that snatches up the seed from the path. As soon as it's sown, he snatches it up. Even so, the devil and his agents are here to snatch up the word of God just as fast as it comes out of my mouth because he wants people damned.

[43:50] That's his heart. I told you he's the antithesis of God. God loves, he so loved this wicked world that he sent his one and only son into it.

And the devil so hates people that he seeks to divert them from this Christ and from his word. his man Elimus tried to turn to divert the pro-council from the faith.

I want you to leave knowing that diversion is the devil's strategy to keep sinners damned. It's diversion. You know that's the work of any magician.

He's diverting you from what he's doing. Over here he's doing something with that coin or card. He doesn't want you looking at that. So what's he do? He's diverting you with his handkerchief and with something over here very flashy and while he's got you looking here you're not seeing what he's doing here.

And that's the word that's used for Elimus and that's the nature of Satan to divert people from the word of the Lord. From the gospel.

[44:59] The word about God and he'll use anything to keep you from the Lord Jesus. He'll use your work. He'll use people in your lives. He'll use entertainments.

He'll use false religion. He'll use anything to divert your attention away from the gospel. Away from the word of God that tells you about a holy God that will in no way clear the guilty.

That tells you of his holy laws that you have broken. That tells you of his holy wrath awaiting all outside of Christ for all eternity. That tells you of the gospel of Jesus that he bore the wrath that sinners deserved.

He took the hell in their place. And that tells you you must renounce your sin and turn from it and come and embrace the Savior as yours in order to have eternal.

He doesn't want you hearing the word of God, doing anything about it, so he diverts you. He snatches up the seed. He doesn't want you finding mercy and blessing in this life and unendingly in the life to come.

[46 : 07] That's the devil's diversion. Are you being deceived, diverted by him this morning? Let me tell you, if you are not in Christ right now, you are being diverted whether you know it or not.

End the diversion this morning. Come to this Jesus. Come right now. Trust in him. You can reach him from your seat and just cry out to him in your heart.

Lord, Jesus, have mercy on me and save me. And just promise so that you will find mercy and he will abundantly pardon.

Let's pray. You talk to this God. I'll talk to him. We're all going to meet him someday. Let's respond to the word that we've heard from him.

after a moment of silent prayer, I'll close. Thank you, Father, for not leaving us in our sin, clinging to a lie that would have damned us, ignoring the gospel that would save us.

[47 : 18] Thank you for the many ways you got our attention, some with serious temporal judgments, sins, but that spared them from your eternal wrath.

There's others that still need to know you. Have mercy upon them. Give them to see the loveliness of Jesus that he has come to save sinners.

That's his promise. That's his mission. That's why he came. That's why he is sending his gospel and sending preachers with this message all around the world because he loves to save sinners.

He delights in mercy. He rejoices over one that repents. So come with power and save today. Thank you for the amazing grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He is full of grace. More full of grace than we could be of sin. Oh, thrill our hearts all over again with just how amazing the saving grace of Jesus is.

[48 : 24] We pray in his name. Amen.