

The Holy Spirit

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We are studying in God's word today, Acts 13. Our series on the Holy Spirit is designed to show you, everywhere Jesus wants to be, he wants you to be there in the power of the Holy Spirit.

You have that power.

Acts 13:2, the Holy Spirit said;

Acts 13:4, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit;

Acts 13:9, Saul filled with the Holy Spirit;

Acts 13:52 (the last words of Acts 13) and the disciples were filled with the joy and the Holy Spirit.

Your best life is lived in the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit.

³⁸ Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. ³⁹ Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses. (Acts 13-NIV)

The two most important days of your life are:

- the day you were born and
- the day you figured out why you were born.

In Acts 13, the apostle Paul starts to figure out **why** he was born.

Paul was born to teach Jews and Gentiles, that rules and regulations, dos and don'ts or being good enough cannot save you. You are saved alone, by God's grace. Ok, keep that in mind. Put that in your back pocket.

Barnabas, Saul and John Mark are shot out of a canon. In Acts 13, they start their first missionary journey. These travels will last for two years. The first leg of the journey will take them from Antioch of Syria to Antioch, Pisidia.

There are a surprising number of cities and towns across America named Kansas. There's a town called Kansas in Illinois, Kansas in Alabama. There's a Kansas in Kentucky... and a Kansas in Ohio. There are two Antioch's in our text. The team leaves Antioch, Syria and end their travels in Antioch, Pisidia which is Turkey.

⁴ The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. ⁵ When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper. (Acts 13-NIV)

This is John Mark who is the author of the gospel of Mark and a cousin to Barnabas. John is important because he is the only eyewitness to the ministry of Jesus. The team starts in Cyprus because this Barnabas home.

Until now, Jerusalem has been the homebase for the Christ follower's ministry and the apostle Peter has been its leader. But, from this day on the message of Jesus atoning death and resurrection and the expansion of the church would launch from Antioch, Syria. Jerusalem is the mother church; Antioch is the mission church.

The baton is now passed from Peter to Paul, known as Saul in the opening verses of Acts 13. Saul is his Jewish name, and Paul is his Roman name. Likely someone in the family was given Roman citizenship and so Paul inherited that status.

Jesus Christ is very much alive in the power of the Holy Spirit and on the move through this converted to Jesus Christ religious terrorist turned preacher.

Paul possessed all the zeal, intellect and racial heritage needed to get the job done, including being a Jew, a Roman, and a Greek scholar. In a few minutes you will see why this matters.

For Paul, life was a journey to introduce Jesus Christ to the world of the Jew, Greek and Roman.

Paul sits right in the middle of this religious world of the Jew, Greek and Roman. **The Jew** with its law, land, and leader Moses, Paul was a loyal follower to the faith of Abraham and the law of Moses.

Paul was comfortable in **the Greek** world with its gods of Zeus, Hercules, Atlas and Poseidon, its Greek plays celebrating Alexander the Great. Paul was well versed in Koine Greek and wrote many of his letters in Greek. On the platform today, you can look at a Greek NT.

Paul would become an authority on **Rome's** government and would declare to their god the Caesar, there is only one Lord, and his name is Jesus Christ. Years later Rome would allow Christianity to be practiced without the fear of death.

Paul was a brilliant spokesman and educator in the world of the Jew, the Greek and the Roman. Few had such impressive credentials. Why is this so important? Because Jesus atoning death would now be available to all seekers and sinners who were not just Jewish, but Greek and Roman.

Paul led the team that would take Jesus Christ to all parts of the ancient world preaching about the resurrection of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins that he offered.

³⁸ Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. (Acts 13-NIV)

Paul would learn this is no easy task, and on numerous occasions he would discover the cost included suffering, hardship, sickness, prison and eventually death.

2 Corinthians 10:10-NLT, tells us that Paul's Facebook picture was not that impressive to look at, For some say, "Paul's letters are demanding and forceful, but in person he is weak, and his speeches are worthless!" Ouch!

If you had been beaten 3 times with rods, experienced 39 lashes at the hands of his Jewish countrymen, 3 times shipwrecked, adrift a night and day at sea, danger in rivers, danger from robbers, experienced cold, exposure, hunger and thirst you might look a little beaten up, also. Don't you think?

And don't forget the sickness that he carried with him in the form of a "thorn in the flesh" most of his life. Paul's thorn in the flesh was not sin, it was suffering. Spiritual struggles, that God used to keep him humble. You can read about this in 2 Cor 12.

None of this slowed Paul down. Paul traveled halfway around the world in his lifetime, a total of over 17,000 miles telling anyone that would listen...

...God loved them, Christ died for them and the Holy Spirit could empower them for God's service.

And like Paul whose life was not linear, predictable, and controllable, you too as a Christ follower experience the same kind of life...

Your life is not totally **linear**, it is not **predictable**, and we all know that it is not **controllable**.

Question. What was Paul so worked up about? What was driving Paul forward? Why was he so driven, even to the point of carrying a death sentence over his head the final 7 chapters of the book of Acts.

³⁰ The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut.

³¹ While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. (Acts 21-NIV)

Paul was making sure, that what Jesus Christ started he finished. The preaching. The loving. The deliverance. The healings. So....

The book of Acts is the continuation of all that Jesus did and taught.

Plato. Aristotle. Had nothing over Paul. Paul puts together an understanding of God's purposes for mankind like no other person. He saw what God was up too, like no other person.

This is key: Paul was the catalyst who realized, quit trying to convince hard-hearted religious racists that Christ died for them, and go to the lands and peoples who were yet, to hear how much Jesus Christ loved them. Come on that was good, say it again!

Paul was one of the great public intellectuals of the ancient world.

Paul could put Athens, Greece intellectuals in their place, with humor, hey friends, I noticed you covered all your religious bases, listen to Paul's humor,

For as I walked around and looked at carefully your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.

The moral of the story: *So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship – and this is what I am going to proclaim to you. (Acts 17:23-NIV)*

When we read about Paul in the New Testament, he **educates us...**

...Paul shows how Judaism and Christianity can be reconciled to God through Old Testament animal sacrifice and now New Testament Jesus Christ sacrifice.

And how Judaism is the root from which Christianity grows. And how Christianity is the tree Judaism was always destined to become. Boom! Revelation. That blows my mind.

Paul startles us.... In Romans 7:24, Paul calls himself a wretch, a chapter later he calls himself a more than conqueror in Romans 8:37.

Paul rebukes us...To the Jewish Galatians and those who think being good somehow saves, Paul declares, you confused Galatians, who has bewitched you.

⁶I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel. (Galatians 1:6-NIV)

Pay attention to Paul's message of grace, this is what Paul will use as his game changing theme in his first sermon in *Acts 13:43b (NIV)*, *Paul and Barnabas ... urged them to continue in the grace of God.*

Finally, Paul encourages us....and to those who feel like a failure in Christ, Paul announces in *Romans 8:1-NIV*, *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

As we work our way through the remaining chapters of the book of Acts 13-28, Paul will travel to and through the cultures of Israel, Greece and Rome. Whenever, Paul landed in a new

community he went directly to a Jewish synagogue first and presented Jesus as the long awaited for Messiah, declaring his atoning death and resurrection thus making available the power to forgive sins to all who believed.

³⁸ Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. (Acts 13-NIV)

Paul lived during the convergence of three world cultures – Israel, Greece and Rome.

Paul was a Jew, and he will not leapfrog over his own people to take Christ to the gentiles. But, to Paul the Jewish role in world had reached its fulfillment. Its summit. Its zenith. In the arrival of Israel's messiah-Jesus Christ. Paul told the story of Israel's messiah being crucified as a part of God's great plan to offer salvation to the world of the Jew and Gentile. Jesus' death became the ultimate fulfillment of Abraham's promise from God to bless the whole world.

Paul was a citizen of Rome. Maybe someone in Paul's family ancestry served in the Roman army, thus granting him the opportunity of Roman citizenship. Paul came from Tarsus, in Turkey. He studied in Jerusalem, but he was born in Tarsus.

Paul was completely familiar with the crushing weight of the Roman government and Rome's many military conquests, including Rome's conquest of Palestine. Should we be surprised that the Christians in Rome would get a letter from the apostle?

The book of Romans. Paul was ready to take on the cult of Caesar, Rome's god and challenge the empire with the truth, the real Lord of the Universe is the resurrected Savior and judge Jesus Christ.

In the end, Paul would die for Christ in Rome! So, be it, Paul concluded.

Paul was at ease with Greece. Finally, Paul was familiar with the traditions of Greece.

When he argues with Greeks about Christ he sounds like one of their own philosophers. Paul can talk the language of the Greek.

Paul, Barnabas and John Mark ... *have sailed from there to island of Cyprus. (Acts 13:4b-NIV)*. The reason that John Mark is such a critical team member, he is the only person who knew Jesus Christ personally. Suddenly, they are invited into the home of the governor-Sergius Paulus. He was called the proconsul.

The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. (Acts 13:7b-NIV)

After a power encounter with the demons of darkness, one of his own employees named Bar-Jesus a Jewish sorcerer, the governor gets saved. He trusts Christ. He has his sins forgiven. To

be saved means to have the death sentence which is declared over you because of sin, cancelled and removed by giving you eternal life, *all who were appointed for eternal life believed. (Acts 13:48b-NIV)*

When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord. (Acts 13:12-NIV)

On your way to Christ, many have their path blocked by the enemy. A sorcerer complicates the journey of Sergius Paulus. Elymas disrupted the proconsul's journey to see the KING.

Maybe you have never thought about this, but everyone's journey toward the king runs into some opposition. A roadblock. A complication at some point.

Everyone's spiritual journey hits roadblocks on their journey to the KING.

A smart businesswoman is dragged to church, and she says I am only going once, but then while at church she finds Christ and tells her boyfriend who is shocked.

In that service God touches her life and to her surprise she is blocked by her boyfriend. Who calls her out-you are going to believe those myths? You are drinking the religious Kool-aide thing.

You graduated 4th in your class at KU, and you believe in all this religious nonsense. Are you going to send money to televangelists too?

He becomes the cynic. The complicator. He becomes the roadblock.

If this businesswoman is going to do a journey she is going to have to do without her boyfriend. Most every serious Christ follower can describe in vivid terms how there were barriers and obstacles to overcome on their journey to the king.

*Sometimes it is a cynical person.

*Sometimes it is a set of circumstances.

*Sometimes it is just old-fashioned doubts.

*Sometimes it is pride. I have been the king; I like running my own program.

*Sometimes you have to do a little research on how scripture and science fit together.

My understanding and observation after 35 years of pastoring is that **"nobody walks uninterrupted all the way to the king."**

Nobody walks uninterrupted on their journey to the KING.

Listen to Paul's encounter to remove the roadblock so Sergius Paulus can be saved.

⁶⁻⁷ They traveled the length of the island, and at Paphos came upon a Jewish wizard who had worked himself into the confidence of the governor, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man not easily taken in by charlatans. The wizard's name was Bar-Jesus. He was as crooked as a corkscrew.

⁷⁻¹¹ The governor invited Barnabas and Saul in, wanting to hear God's Word firsthand from them. But Dr. Know-It-All (that's the wizard's name in plain English) stirred up a ruckus, trying to divert the governor from becoming a believer. But Saul (or Paul), full of the Holy Spirit and looking him straight in the eye, said, "You bag of wind, you parody of a devil—why, you stay up nights inventing schemes to cheat people out of God.

But now you've come up against God himself, and your game is up. You're about to go blind—no sunlight for you for a good long stretch." He was plunged immediately into a shadowy mist and stumbled around, begging people to take his hand and show him the way. ¹² When the governor saw what happened, he became a believer, full of enthusiasm over what they were saying about the Master. (Acts 13-MSG)

Now, let's look at the first sermon Paul ever preached as recorded in Acts 13:16-41.
Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: ... (Acts 16:16a-NIV)

Why did Paul use his hands - because he was Italian. In the sermon Paul shows how Judaism and Christianity fit together. They are not at odds with each other. Both are a part of God's great plan to restore sinful humanity to its rightful place as the people of God living in reconciliation to God the Father.

Paul preached his first sermon in Antioch Pisidia disclosing how passionate he was about Jesus Christ. Here are the highlights of Paul's first sermon:

Act 1- Israel from the beginning was object of God's love.

Act 2- Because of God's love he gave them land, a law and leader named Moses.

Act 3- From the line of David God promised a savior to rescue Jew and Gentile from sin. He has arrived, died and offers forgiveness of sin.

Act 4- God's people rejected Jesus and crucified him, but God raised him from the dead.

Acts 5- The law of Moses no longer works, it is broken, but Jesus bypasses the laws shortcomings and through Jesus' death and forgiveness, you can have eternal life.

Everything God promised to Israel is now fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

What happened? So many wanted faith in Christ, that the team stuck around for a week, talking to everyone who wanted to be saved.

⁴³ When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God. (Acts 13-NIV)

Word got around, and the following Saturday *“almost the whole city came to hear God’s word as taught by Paul.”*

⁴⁴ On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. (Acts 13-NIV)

When the members of the synagogue arrived, they found strangers sitting in their pews. I hate it when that happens.

Nobody has benefitted more from God’s grace than the apostle Paul.

With every sermon Paul recalled what happened on the Damascus Road, he could have gotten justice, God striking him dead. What he got was mercy and grace. And nobody knew that better than Paul.

He was alive only because of mercy and grace. And his journey into the Gentile world of Greece and Rome, he would make sure everyone who listened would hear about how a religious terrorist received life, instead of getting death. No other religion offers free forgiveness of sins and a new life for those who have done nothing to deserve it.

What is sad, is that not everyone wants God’s grace. It disturbs them. Because it is free, they still want to work for it. It seems too good to be true. I often wonder why so many can’t trust God’s grace. I think I figured it out years ago... Grace means that God already loves you as much as an all-forgiving and holy God can possibly love.

Grace removes self-sufficiency, on rung of the ladder at a time. God’s grace when it finds a home turns you into a gracious person. God’s grace when it arrests you, makes you a forgiving person.

Every religion is a battering system: if I do this, God will do that. Wrong. Big fail. Christianity towers over Islam, Buddhism, Mormonism, Judaism, Secularism, atheism and announces-

Grace is a gift and not an achievement.

Ok, I think I and Paul have made our case, so for the hungry and desperate ready to receive God's grace and mercy, I offer this prayer of thanks. To the unconvinced, no amount of persuasion will do. I hope you change your mind someday. Why not talk to those who were water baptized today, I think they are "satisfied customers."

I can't think of a better way to end today than offer a prayer of thanks because God gave us His grace, instead of death. God gave us His mercy, instead of the miserable destination of hell. *And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life - Matthew 25:46 (ESV).*

As we follow Paul in the weeks to come as he travels and preaches to Jews, Greeks and Romans, his message of grace will be the primary note he plays on. The lone sermon he has. The single string, he strums.

Amazing Grace how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost and now I am found, was blind and now I see.

Those words were written by two men who spent a good share of their life at sea. John Newton and the Apostle Paul. It took blindness of a storm and the literal blindness on a road to open their eyes to see Jesus. If you are blind to Christ today, why not start to see. Why not gain your spiritual sight? Take this prayer and make it yours.

Father, today You offer grace and mercy to all who declare they are bankrupt of the "religion of works" and "religion of being good enough." Because being good enough is just not good enough to receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Only Jesus' atoning death and forgiveness of sins can remove my sentence of death and offer me eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

I say "yes" to Jesus as my **substitute**. I say "yes" to Jesus as my **Savior**. I say "yes" to Jesus as a **son** and **daughter**!

In Jesus' Name, Amen.