



SENT – Part 10

Willing to Die For

In Part 10 of our series in the book Acts, **Sent**, we will read **Acts 13:2-12** and ponder the question: what are we willing to die for? Last week, the early church faced Herod Agrippa I who used his authority to persecute Christians. James, one of the twelve Apostles and brother to John, was executed, and Peter was imprisoned. However, an angel appeared to free him, and Herod was struck down by God for exalting himself. What initially seemed like a defeat for the church was transformed into a great victory as the text says the Word of God spread and multiplied.

The story picks up with Barnabas and Saul (also called Paul) being appointed by the Holy Spirit directly to preach the Gospel to the island of Cyprus. Up to this point the Gospel has spread as the result of Christians being forced to disperse due to persecution, but here the church does intentional sending. On Cyprus the two encounter a false prophet and sorcerer named Bar-Jesus who seeks to oppose them. Knowing that persecution and opposition wait on the other side, only by knowing what we are willing to die for will we find what we are willing to live for.



BELONG

Start the group with an opportunity for community. We want this to be a place where the body of Christ can **belong** by sharing their lives with one another in genuine fellowship.

- How is everyone's week going? Any life updates?
 - What is something the group can be praying about?
 - What is something the group can praise this week?
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- Is there anything in your life right now that you would be willing to die for?
 - When it comes to defending the truth, how does that look in the context of the issues we face today?
 - Is Jesus, the Gospel, and your faith something you talk about often, or something you keep to yourself?
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BELIEVE

Move into the relevant Bible passages and read along together. This is where the body of Christ can learn together to **believe** in Jesus more and love Him better.

Acts 13:1-12 (NASB)

13 Now there were prophets and teachers at Antioch, in the church that was *there*: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ² While they were serving the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set Barnabas and Saul apart for Me for the work to which I have called them." ³ Then, when they had fasted, prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. ⁴ So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. ⁵ When they reached Salamis, they *began* to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper.

⁶ When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus, ⁷ 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. ⁸ But Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. ⁹ But Saul, who was also *known as* Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, stared at him, ¹⁰ and said, "You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not stop making crooked the straight ways of the Lord? ¹¹ Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time." And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand. ¹² Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord.

1. Willing to Move for Truth

What moves you? What stirs up your emotions and moves your heart. What moves you to take a step? What moves you to actually do something?

For many of us, what moves us is a job, money, comfort, security, or approval. These things are guiding forces in our lives, pushing us to live and act in a certain way according to what it is that motivates us.

Unfortunately, what this quick exercise demonstrates is that we are often willing to move for meaningless things rather than eternal things. If we are moved to action by meaningless things more than we are eternal things, then we are living a meaningless



life, and that is a tragedy, especially for the people of God who claim to have the truth inside them.

In verse two, Barnabas and Saul are appointed by the Holy Spirit to go and preach the Gospel. The church affirms the Spirit's choice by fasting, praying, and laying hands on the two of them. Having done so, they are officially sent out to preach the Word of God to the island of Cyprus. This is yet another milestone for the early church as Barnabas and Saul are being selected to spread the Gospel to places other than Judea and its surrounding regions.

For the early church, sharing the Gospel was everything. It was the Gospel, and the Gospel alone, that moved early Christians to action in their everyday lives. More broadly, it was a love of the truth that made Christians willing to move. The truth of Jesus being the Son of God, dying on the Cross for their sins, and rising from the dead to the promise of a future return where all would be set right was everything.

While the context of our world has changed, our calling as believers has not changed. The fervor with which the early church sought to change the world should describe us today in our actions. If the Gospel and things of God do not move us, we need to check our hearts and identify what we are really living for.

2. Willing to Protect the Truth

Verse five says that Barnabas and Saul preached the Word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. Synagogues were relatively small gathering places for the Jewish people in their local communities to come together to hear the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) spoken by a Rabbi (a Jewish religious teacher). In this way, Barnabas and Saul were going straight to the religious centers of Judaism itself to preach the name of Jesus.

Evidently, word of their exploits spread throughout the island as a sorcerer named Bar-Jesus sought to hear them preach. Bar-Jesus, also known as Elymus, was with a proconsul (governor of a Roman province, of which Cyprus had several) named Sergius Paulus. Archeologists have discovered on the island of Cyprus at least one inscription bearing the name "Paulus," and although the dating of the inscription prevents it from being a reference to Paulus from the Bible, it establishes the credibility of the Bible by demonstrating its record of events was accurate to the time in which they were recorded.

This matters because as the church, we must be willing to defend and protect the truth. The entire Bible is a collection of readily verifiable documents that reliably record real events in time that we can trust and base our lives on. However, that truth is constantly and consistently threatened by those who openly and intentionally oppose God. Verse eight tells us that Bar-Jesus sought to oppose Barnabas and Saul so that he could keep



them from turning Sergius Paulus to the faith. In the same way, we today face those attempting to turn us and others away from the truth.

Saul (also known as Paul) was a master of meeting people where they were, and contextualizing the Gospel so those in a particular setting could understand it. However, he never compromised the truth to do so, and he did not tolerate those who spread a false Gospel. In his response to Bar-Jesus, Paul refers to him as a “son of the devil.” This is a big accusation, not one most Christians would be willing to make today if face to face with a false prophet.

The church today has struggled with how to balance grace and truth. How do we confront those with the truth without being judgmental (or coming across that way)? This is a legitimate question, there is another consideration rarely discussed. Does who I am speaking to affect how I should respond to them? The answer is yes. There are those who simply do not know the Gospel, and there are those who actively oppose it. It is this second group that demands a more firm and direct response.

Paul doesn't hold back for such individuals because the truth is at stake, and neither should we for fear of being seen as unkind. In the United States today, we are faced with the problem of transgenderism, homosexuality, and abortion run rampant (just to name a few). For those struggling with gender dysphoria, same-sex attraction, or the choice to kill their unborn child, gentleness and kindness are needed in approaching these individuals and sharing the truth of the Gospel with them. However, on the other hand, there are those who openly and emphatically support these lifestyles and behaviors and seek to influence impressionable people to accept such things as good and just.

We must be willing unto death to protect the world from such lies. According to Jesus Himself in Matthew 18:6, it is better for someone who causes another person to sin to have a great millstone fastened around their neck and drowned in the sea. That is how serious God takes a false Gospel and the intentional leading of people into damnation through the propagation of lies. When it comes to the Gospel, there is no room to budge, and there is no room to compromise. If we are willing to die for the truth, we must be willing to protect it.

3. Willing to Proclaim the Truth

We must remember that amid the chaos of our world, people are looking for the truth. That is what makes a false prophet so dangerous; people who claim to have the truth, but instead spread lies and deceit, can be difficult for those without the truth in them to deny. Sometimes, we desire the truth so badly that we are willing to accept a counterfeit just so that we can feel we have security.



Whether or not the church acts, the world is going to proclaim its version of the story. For this reason, inaction on the part of Christians is not an option. If your life has been changed by Jesus, you must proclaim it! And if you believe He can change other people's lives, you must proclaim it! If you don't proclaim the truth to the world, the world will provide its own "truth" in its place.

Christians in the early church couldn't stop talking about the Gospel. They could be threatened, arrested, or killed, but they would not cease preaching the Gospel. Barnabas and Saul, opposed by Bar-Jesus, show no fear by rebuking him. In the process of refusing to proclaim the truth even in the face of opposition, verse twelve tells us that the proconsul Sergius Paulus believed, and was astonished at the Word of God.

If this sounds like it is too big for you, or too high a task, then you are right. This isn't just any mission, but God's mission, so of course it comes with the appropriate weight of responsibility! However, you are not meant to answer this call alone. God intends for us to work together side by side with our brothers and sisters in Christ to fulfill his mission. Even more importantly, God promises to empower us to complete it. Verse nine says that Saul was filled with the Holy Spirit when he responded to Bar-Jesus.

In the same way, we each have the Holy Spirit living within us if we have accepted Christ. It is God's power working through us that will ensure our success and not our own strength. If we are willing to die for the truth, we must be willing to proclaim it.



BECOME

Wrap up the discussion by asking some closing questions. We can **become** more like the people God is calling us to be by reflecting on what we've learned and applying it.

- Barnabas and Saul were called by the Holy Spirit and sent by the church. We too are called by the Holy Spirit to preach the Gospel in our world.
 - Does the truth of the Gospel excite us?
 - Is the Gospel the primary motivation of everything we do in our lives?
 - What things move us to action other than the truth of God's Word? Do those things move us more than the things of God do?
- Saul unapologetically protected the truth by rebuking Bar-Jesus, and he did so in admittedly harsh terms.
 - How can we discern between those sincerely seeking after the truth and those who overtly oppose it?
 - What should our response look like to someone who is openly trying to convince others to reject the Gospel?
 - When we protect the truth, is it more important to be seen as nice above all else or to speak the truth above all else?
- Saul's proclaiming the truth of God's Word led to Sergius Paulus being saved and becoming a follower of Jesus.
 - Would we be willing to proclaim the truth even if it meant we would lose something? Our job? Our money? Even our lives?
 - What does it mean to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to fulfill the mission of spreading the Gospel? How does following the lead of the Spirit look different than relying on myself?