

Text: Acts 13:6-12

Topic: The devil.

Theme: The devil is limited.

My purpose for this message: To urge believers not to fear the devil, but stand up to him.

Delivered: January 18, 2004 @ KEFC by Keith Rohrer

[Book Thesis: The Power of God Spreads the Gospel]

Defy the Devil, don't Fear Him

A few minutes before the services began, the congregation was filing into the auditorium. Lively conversation was rising to match the recorded music when suddenly, Satan appeared down in front.

Well, you can imagine, everyone began screaming a racing for the exits. People trampled each other as they tried to escape. Soon the church was empty except for one elderly man over on the left who continued to sit calmly without budging, seemingly oblivious to the fact that he was in the presence of God's ultimate enemy.

Satan approached the man and raged, "Don't you know who I am?" The man nodded.

"Yep, Sure do."

"Aren't you afraid of me?"

"No sir, I'm not."

"Don't you realize I can kill you just by a single word?"

The senior saint looked at him evenly. "Don't doubt it for a minute."

"Do you realize I can cause you profound, horrifying AGONY for all eternity?" fumed the devil.

"Yep."

"And you're still not afraid?"

"Nope."

Livid, the devil shrieked, "And why is it that you aren't afraid of me?"

The man explained, "Been married to your sister for 48 years."

Turn to Acts 13:6-12. The topic this morning is the devil; the *theme* of the morning is, the devil isn't as fearsome as we fear. PRAY. READ.

Background

The missionaries made their way across the island, likely ministering in towns along the way. Some 90 miles later they arrived at the coastal town of Paphos, the capital of Cyprus. It was a fairly new city, built down the road from the *historic* Phoenician town of Paphos which an earthquake leveled 50 years earlier. There were Jewish people there, but also many pagans. Paphos was—after all—considered the birthplace of the Greek goddess of love, Aphrodite, so many pagans made religious pilgrimages here.

The island's governor who lived in Paphos, was an intelligent man. No doubt he was skilled at handling the complexities of the island's religions. When he heard about Saul and Barnabas' provocative new teaching, either out of genuine spiritual interest, or wanting to make sure the new doctrine would not disrupt society's peace, he sent for the missionaries. V. 7 says Sergius Paulus sent for them *because* he wanted to hear the word of God.

The men agreed to come and were ushered into court. After the obligatory greetings, Saul began to tell the proconsul about Jesus. A Jewish man who came from God, born to a virgin,

who grew to be a man, who taught about the kingdom of God. Then he died, was buried, and rose again on the third day to bring eternal life to the humble.

All the while Saul kept his eye on a fellow standing suspiciously near the throne. He was a Jew too, Bar-Jesus, also called Elymas which means sorcerer, wizard, or magician. In v.6 he's called a false prophet and a magician. False prophet not as in Balaam who had genuine demonic power, but false prophet as in a Benny Hinn, a charlatan who tricks people. The Greek word for magician is "Magos" as in Magi. In Matt.2 it is used in honor, to describe eastern court seers who sought spiritual truth. But it is more often a term of disdain describing a swindler.

Noticing the proconsul's interest, Bar-Jesus interrupted, "Sir, you don't want to listen to this. Fables, myths, deception, all of it! There is nothing of worth in this novel teaching." We're not sure where Elymas' religious loyalties lay even though he was a Jew. After all, Judaism strictly prohibited sorcery. It seems likely his beliefs were a convenient dash of Judaism mixed with a less-than-serious dash of occultism, topped off by a generous portion of self-serving trickery.

And Saul lashed out at him. Both barrels.

- You're a child of the devil
- You're an enemy of everything that's right
- You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery
- You pervert the right ways of the Lord

"And because you oppose God, He opposes you and for a time you are going to blind." Immediately this snake oil salesman began stumbling about, hunting desperately for someone to lead him; he couldn't see. The proconsul was so stunned by the show of God's power that he surrendered to Jesus Christ and became a Christian.

The Fear Factor

I want to talk a little bit about the devil—much as it pains me to give this defector air time. Because the devil is the antihero in this story, the bad guy—not just Elymas. Two observations:

1. Elymas was not a witch, a warlock, probably didn't practice spells and incantations, or do tarot card readings. He was just a fake. But he was a tool of the devil. You don't have to be deeply occultic to be in the devil's service. (READ Acts 16:16-18; Mark 8:32-33).
2. The devil scares people. After all, this is...
 - An incredibly powerful angel roaming the world, looking for someone to destroy (1 Pet.5:8).
 - A rebel angel who presents himself *not* as a red-suited comic action figure with horns and a pitchfork, but as an incredibly alluring "angel of light" (2 Cor.11:14).
 - The spirit being who destroyed Job's life, his health, his family, his security.
 - The enemy of all men's souls who infested this world with sin by seducing the first humans.
 - The sweet talker who tried to subvert Jesus and get him to throw the world away.
 - The same devil who convinced Judas Iscariot to sell out Jesus for money.
 - The same Satan who stars in Frank Peretti's Christian horror novels!

So people are afraid of the devil, of Satan, of the enemy of their souls. But look at Saul's fearless handling of this guy. How?

Saul knew God's power makes the devil's power look puny. And to those who belong to God, Satan has power *only* when we give it to him (READ 1 Jn.4:4; Eph.6:10).

Let me assure you.

- though the devil wants you, if you have surrendered to Jesus Christ, he can't have you.
- though it's true that the devil wants to hurt you, attack what you have, hit those you love as a way to break your allegiance to God, not one thing *will* come to pass without God's approval. And if Satan *does* steal your family, does steal your goods, does steal your health, does steal your reputation, God put his sovereign stamp of approval on it and anytime he does so, he does so for the good of those who love him and who have been called according to his purpose. (Rom.8:28)
- though the devil's temptation is powerful, *you* have the might of God in you because you have the Holy Spirit in you: you don't *have* to give in to his temptation.

READ Jas.4:1-10. Resist the devil. How? REREAD vv.7-10. To resist is to submit to God. Every time I wander into sin, I wander into the edge of the enemy's camp. Every time I wander into sin, I stop resisting the devil and begin welcoming him. A lot of Christians today have bought into the "rebuke the demon" mentality which pays too much attention to the devil and too little attention to personal sin. If we don't renounce the latter, we'll fail in our attempt to renounce the former. READ Eph.4:26-27. Resist; resist; resist! READ 1 Peter 5:8-9.

Conclusion

The devil is a defeated foe. READ Col.2:15: Through the cross, Jesus...*disarmed the powers and authorities, making a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.* He's defeated. And he's weak. God is everywhere at once, Satan can only be one place. God knows all things, Satan knows only what he can see. While he can exploit our weaknesses, he has no access to our brains; he can't plant thoughts. God's power is without limit, but Satan must ask God for permission for everything (Job 1-2). God has never lost any of his children, but Satan loses his every day (Col.1:13).

However, if you are outside of the fellowship of Christ, outside the circle of faith, outside the church, you are vulnerable (1 Cor.5:5; 1 Tim.1:20).