

"Journeys and Destinations - Cyprus"
Pastor Wally Contreras
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"So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them. When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus. He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, "You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time." Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord." (Acts 13:4-12)

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So Saul (Paul), Barnabas (who was from Cyprus originally), and John Mark were "sent out by the Holy Spirit". During a message by John Piper, he asked these questions: "I wonder if you know why I have complete confidence that the Holy Spirit is mightily at work in this room right now. Or, more specifically — and this is more important — do you know that the Holy Spirit is right now at work powerfully in your life? Can you identify your experience — and I do mean experience — of the Spirit at work in your life now? This very moment?" Do I "know that the Holy Spirit is right now at work powerfully in your life?" Explain.

Piper pointed out the following additional verses. "Listen to these amazing acts of the Holy Spirit to guide the mission of the early church:

I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there. (Acts 20:22)

Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome. (Acts 19:21)

They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. (Acts 16:6)

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. . . . So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. (Acts 13:2, 4)"

What "amazing acts of the Holy Spirit" is guiding the mission of our church? Explain.

Dean Milman once said that, “Whoever does not have a sense of being predestined by God to service will never work, nor ever has worked any revolution for God. People who make differences in the world are people who are on a divine mandate, who are bound in their spirit to the call of God deep and profound.” If God chooses whomever He chooses and goes with whomever He chooses as Pastor Wally said and I’ve been chosen by Him for His Kingdom, then for what purpose was I saved and to do what work?

The fact that Paul’s missionary team was able cover the island of Cyprus in 4 or 5 months reflects a compelling purpose and a severe sense of urgency. They did not tarry along the way taking in the sights...they were on a mission...for God. John MacArthur asked, “If you name the name of Christ, then ask yourself if you’re compelled in your service to God. Do you know what your spiritual gift is? Are you using that gift? Are you compelled to use it? Do you feel burdened in your heart and a sense of some shame if you are not using it?...[are you] left with a bit of guilt because you don’t do what you really believe in your heart you ought to do and what God’s Word says to do?” (Emphasis added.) What has the Holy Spirit been tugging on my heart to do or to say to someone in the last several weeks?

What, if anything, has been stifling the Holy Spirit’s call to action in my life and why?

Referencing Luke’s brief comment that Paul’s missionary team went “through the whole island as far as Paphos” to summarize all of their activities in 17 cities over a 4 to 5 month period of preaching the Gospel message, Pastor Wally said that I need to reflect on how God is working in my day-to-day life of mundane, tedious activities, those activities as Webster’s 1828 dictionary defines them as “[b]elonging to the world”. Do I see God working in my life when I’m washing dishes or vacuuming the house, sitting in on yet another Zoom meeting with the boss, or scanning through my email inbox? If so, how so? If not, what are some things I can do to help me see that He is “at hand” (see Jeremiah 23:23-24)?

As opposed to God working in my day-to-day life of mundane, tedious activities, Pastor Wally said that I more easily see that God is working “when something huge happens”. When is anything that God does ever not “huge”?

What are some things that hinder or prevent me from seeing the “hugeness” of God’s work in my day-to-day “mundane” life? Explain.

Pastor Wally said that “magic” performed by “magicians” in Scripture is a term for “unapproved actors, performing acts which are not approved by God, in the attempt to manipulate/control” others. R. C. Sproul pointed out that “Ultimately, Jannes and Jambres (believed to be two of Pharaoh’s magicians who were able to imitate some of the signs that God did through Moses as He liberated His people Israel from slavery – see 2 Timothy 3:8–9) did not get very far with their sorcery, as they were exposed as frauds when they found that there were some signs from God they could not feign (Ex. 8:17–18; 9:11). The same will be the case with false teaching in the church (2 Tim. 3:9). Despite the fact that error sometimes seems to prevail, our Father is sovereign even over the heretic, and his folly will eventually be exposed. John Calvin comments, “As the truth of God prevailed against the tricks of the magicians, so he promises that the doctrine of the gospel shall be victorious against [all] errors that may be invented.”” What are some tools that I have to ensure that “the truth of God prevail[s] against the tricks of the magicians” and Satan?

Do I truly believe that “the doctrine of the gospel shall be victorious against [all] errors that may be invented” or do I, at times, feel hopeless and/or helpless fighting against Satan’s tricks? Explain.

Paul says to Elymas in verse 10 "You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?" John Piper clarified: "What is the making crooked of the straight paths of God? It's what Elymas was doing in verse 8—he was seeking to turn aside the proconsul from the faith. "Turn aside" (in v. 8) corresponds with "make crooked" (in v. 10). And "from the faith" (in v. 8) corresponds with "the straight paths of the Lord" (in v. 10). So the way you make crooked the straight paths of the Lord is to get in the way of people coming to faith." What are some ways that I may inadvertently “get in the way of people coming to faith”?

Do I ever see myself “look[ing] intently at” someone and calling out their actions (“You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy”) as boldly as Paul did? If so, when is it appropriate and how would I go about doing it? If not, why not?