

What to Expect When You Say Yes

Acts 13:4-12

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Andrew Ogea

Good morning! I'm grateful to be able to preach God's Word today. Please turn in your Bibles to Acts 13:4-12. Isn't it true that we have a natural inclination to have knowledge of what we can expect before doing something that we have never done before. All of us find some sense of security in knowing what to expect.

This past week, Freshman and Sophomores at Northshore High School took the Pre-ACT test. They do this so they can know what to expect and adequately prepare for the real ACT test: the kind of information, the timing of the test, how much rest you will need, etc.

Before you get a medical test or procedure done, the doctor or technician will come to you and explain everything that you can expect during and after the procedure. It will last this many hours. You will have to take a certain medication beforehand. You will need to take these precautions to avoid complications. We like to know these things.

Occasionally, our family enjoys going on a cruise. Before we leave, I research the ports on the internet so that I can know what to expect when we arrive at a foreign location that I've never been to. Here are the places that are safe. Here are tips to avoid getting scammed. Here are places you need to go to make sure you go to have the best trip. Does anyone else do the same?

Women who are considering pregnancy or who have just become pregnant want to know what to expect during pregnancy and childbirth. If you are a mom, you've probably read the book *What to Expect When You're Expecting*.

Why is it important for us to know what to expect? Well, because it reduces anxiety. It helps relieve fear. When we know what to expect, we tend to engage in, or attempt things more confidently. It also helps us to know we are not alone; to know the road has been traveled before; to know that others have already been through it and came out on the other side.

Now, we might not always know the details, but through God's Word, He is faithful to help us to know what we can expect when we follow him. For example, he has given us revelation of the end times. He tells us the consequences we can expect when we sin.

His word shows us the peace and comfort we can have in the midst of trials if we stay close to him and strong in faith. He even tells us the life change that we can expect when we trust in Jesus Christ for eternal life. Those are just a few of a long list of examples.

I've entitled this message "What to Expect When You Say Yes". Today, our story in Acts will give you insight for what you can expect when you say "yes" to God and the mission work to which he calls you. If you recall, in Acts 1:8, Jesus had prophesied this verse over his disciples:

"You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Last week we learned about a very strategic church for the evangelization of the world that had formed in Antioch. The church in Antioch was located about 300 miles north of Jerusalem. The prophecy of Christ has already been fulfilled as the Gospel has spread beyond Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. Antioch is just the beginning of the fulfillment of the "to the ends of the earth" portion of Jesus's proclamation.

The church of Antioch was blessed with some well known godly leaders who were sincere and spiritually in tune with God as they served the church. Two of those leaders were Saul and Barnabas. Together, the leaders and their church were devoted to seeking God's will and direction through prayer and fasting.

In one of their prayer meetings, the Holy Spirit called them to set apart Barnabas and Saul for missionary work. The church affirmed this calling, and the Scripture says they laid hands on the two men as a symbolic act, recognizing them as their substitutes chosen by the Holy Spirit, to go and evangelize unreached regions of the world with the Gospel.

The church shared this powerful moment together when the called-ones became the sent-ones by saying yes to God. And the church showed their selfless trust in God by saying yes and sent these men.

Can you imagine the impact of the leadership void that was experienced by this church when they sent out Saul and Barnabas. I think we are getting a glimpse of that hardship as we prepare to send one of our best leaders to a new mission field in his retirement.

Yet, the church in Antioch trusted in God and the work of His Spirit to faithfully and fully support the work He wanted to do. So, they laid hands on them with confidence that the Lord would not only be with the two men as they went, but also that he would provide for the ones who affirmed their sending and stayed behind.

Are you operating with that kind of trust right now? I've got to admit, some days it is hard to trust while waiting in a season of the unknown. Nevertheless, we serve a God who loves his church more than any one of us. We serve a God whose ways are better than our ways, thoughts are higher than our thoughts, and plans are bigger than ours, even when he repositions those we love to different places.

Ultimately, this should be a challenge to our church to remember that one of the main tenets of a healthy church is one which seeks the Lord to discern and develop God-called missionaries, and sends them out with strong support for the work he is accomplishing in this world.

Are you in tune with this mission? Perhaps God is calling you to go to another part of our world that needs the gospel? A friend of mine told me last week that his pastor encouraged his church to put their yes on the table. Even if you don't understand what calling would mean, put your "yes" on the table and God will make it clear in his timing.

Perhaps some of you have been resisting that calling for some time, and a way of putting your "yes" on the table would just be to share with one of the leaders of our church or your small group that you are putting your yes on the table to whatever God has for you.

Now, I hope and pray we realize that God has also commissioned all of us to missions even if we never go to other parts of the world. He has commissioned you and wants you to be His witness in your current context.

So, God is calling you to put your "yes" on the table not only to support those God sends to the ends of the world, but also to say "yes" to your work as a proclaimer of the gospel and minister of reconciliation right here in your local mission field.

You might be thinking: "I don't even know what that would look like." Well, we look to the Scriptures now for God to give us insight into what we can expect when we put our "yes" on the table and start to live as a sent-one whether we are in our local context or in another part of the world. Let's start in Acts 13:4:

Acts 13:4 The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus.

Acts 13:5 When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper.

Acts 13:6 They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus,

Acts 13:7 who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God.

Acts 13:8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith.

Acts 13:9 Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said,

Acts 13:10 “You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?”

Acts 13:11 Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun.” Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand.

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

When we say “yes” to being a sent-one for God, we can first expect to receive maximum support from God.

What to Expect When You Say Yes

1. Maximum Support From God

Verse 4, says, the two men were sent on their way “by the Holy Spirit.” It is the Holy Spirit who calls us, sets us apart, and sends us out for the work of his mission just like he did with these men. And all of this is accomplished in us by his indwelling power from the Spirit.

Maximum Support From God

a. The Spirit’s Power

Alongside Jesus’s Acts 1:8 prophecy that his disciples would be his witnesses to all the world, he made the following promise regarding his Spirit:

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

What a tragic mistake it would be for us to view the Holy Spirit as just some power that we can tap into and use for our own purposes. But, quite the opposite is true. The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity, and as God, he uses us for His divine purposes.

It is the power of the Holy Spirit that blinded the eyes of the sorcerer in our story today. It is the power of the Holy Spirit who gave Paul discernment to recognize the evil forces at work to suppress the gospel.

It is the Spirit which gave power to Saul to speak the word of God with supernatural boldness. And, it is only by the Spirit’s power that we can combat and overcome the forces of evil in our world today.

Earlier, in Acts 8, we see the fallacy of Simon the Magician, who thought he could purchase the power of the Holy Spirit. Selfishly, he strived to obtain and use the power of the Holy Spirit for

his own purposes and personal gain. The Apostle Peter said to him, “You have no part or share in this matter, because your heart is not right before God.”

Simon the magician learned a sobering truth that day - You cannot possess the power of God without first experiencing the presence of God. And this is what makes all the difference for the Christian.

Maximum Support From God

- a. The Spirit’s Power**
- b. The Spirit’s Presence**

When we say yes to God, we can expect the power of the spirit to be at work in us because we already have received the gift of His Spirit which is given to us when we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life. He forgives our sins and makes us right before God. 1 Corinthians 1:21-22 says,

1 Cor. 1:21 Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, 22 set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

According to this verse, Christians have the divine indwelling of the Spirit’s presence in our hearts. As such, the Spirit is constantly strengthening, encouraging, comforting, and directing us. When it comes to saying “yes” to being on mission with God, you might be thinking: “I don’t know if I could ever do something like that.”

You are right. You cannot in your own strength and power. Apart from Christ you can do nothing, but all things are possible because of the Spirit of Christ that resides in you. His presence is with you and will always be with you.

Maximum Support from God

- a. The Spirit’s Power**
- b. The Spirit’s Presence**
- c. The Spirit’s Provision**

In addition to the divine support of the Spirit’s power and presence, you also can trust the Spirit’s provision for you. We see in verse 4 that He provided the missionaries with direction. It says,

Acts 13:4 The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus.

He was faithful to direct these men, and when you say “yes” to God, you can expect that He will be faithful to provide direction for you as well. Proverbs 3:5-6 says,

Proverbs 3:5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

Perhaps you should incorporate requests into your prayer life for a sensitivity and responsiveness to the Spirit's provision of direction. "Lord, direct my steps today. Lead me to those who need to hear the Good News of your salvation. Show me the opportunities in front of me even if they are outside of my normal routine. And, God will be faithful to do it.

In addition to direction, his provision includes the necessary resources to support and sustain you. In verse 5, we learn that the Holy Spirit had blessed Saul and Barnabas with each other as a partnership. He also gave them John Mark as their assistant even if it was only for a little while.

God will always provide in his timing when you need help, whether it be people, financial, or material resources. The old saying is true: where God leads, he provides. Or, as some say, where he leads he feeds. He did it for them and he will do it for you.

What to Expect When You Say Yes

- 1. Maximum Support From God**
- 2. Mixed Responses From Man**

When you say "yes" to God to be a sent-one to spread his Gospel message of Jesus Christ, you can first expect that you will have maximum support from the One who has it all - His power, His presence, and His provision will be available to you by his Spirit. Secondly, you can expect to get mixed responses from man.

We learn that the missionaries traveled from Seleucia, the port at Antioch, to the island of Cyprus. They began their work by proclaiming the word of God in the synagogues. It was a wise strategy to share the news of the Messiah who saves with the Jews who already believed the OT Scriptures, but still had not heard of Christ the Messiah.

But, the majority of this story centers around an encounter that happened on the other side of the island at Paphos. There, they met two men, Sergius Paulus, the Roman governor of Cyprus, and a sorcerer named Bar-Jesus. Through this encounter, we learn of three different types of responses we can expect from man when we share the Gospel.

Mixed Responses from Man

a. Curiosity

The first is curiosity. It says in verse 7 that the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, summoned Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. This governor was obviously hungry to learn more about this Gospel which was completely different from the idolatrous beliefs of his culture.

This shows us that you never know who you will encounter when you say “yes” and start to live as a sent-one for God. You might find seekers within marginalized groups who feel left out and locked out. You may find curiosity from those who grew up in the church, but dropped out at some point.

You may find seekers who have never considered a relationship with God at all, but have come to a point of crisis and they are now considering matters of faith. Or you may find an audience with an influential leader as in the case with these missionaries.

Regardless of the person, a seeker will have the choice between two options when confronted with the truth that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world and salvation from sins and a relationship with God is found only through him. The first option is rejection. The world is full of people once curious or seeking God, but rejected him. As a result, rejection leads to a second response that we can expect in man - callousness.

Mixed Responses from Man

- a. Curiosity**
- b. Callousness**

The man who was with the proconsul was a sorcerer named Elymas, who also went by the name Bar-Jesus. Bar-Jesus may be a name that Elymas may have given himself. It means “son of Jesus.” Of course the callousness displayed here is the exact opposite of that of a son of Jesus.

Elymas was a false Jewish prophet. The false prophet is one who will deceive and lie to serve his own ends. It wasn't uncommon for higher ups in government to have their own sorcerers and truth sayers. So you can imagine his urgency to shut down a Gospel message that would put an end to his livelihood and following.

Elymas had rejected the Gospel to the point that he opposed the missionaries and actively sought to turn others away from the faith. This man stood in between the Gospel and the curious seeker. What a terrible place to be!!

And Saul, who is now noted as Paul stepped in and confronted him. Paul looked him in the eye, and called him out for who he really was. “You are not a son of Jesus, you are a son of the devil. You are an enemy of righteousness and a perverter of the true way to God.” As a result, Paul told him that he would go blind for a while and it actually happened. All of this took place in front of the governor.

There are a couple of important things that we don't want to miss here. First of all, the blindness that came upon Elymas is a physical representation of the spiritual blindness or callousness that forms in the heart of someone who rejects the Gospel.

One of the first hurdles to overcome as a guitar player is the pain felt on the tips of the fingers from pressing down on metal strings. But, if you press enough times that sensitivity begins to go away because calluses form to resist the pain. In a similar way, Romans 1 shows us that a calloused heart forms when someone rejects the gospel over and over again.

Romans 1:28 Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.

Romans 1:29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips,

Romans 1:30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; 31 they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy.

Romans 1:32 Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

Another important note is that this physical blindness was an opportunity for Elymas to see the error in his ways and turn to the one true God. God is good and just in dealing with sinners. 2 Peter 3:9

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Paul knew this truth from experience, because four chapters earlier in Acts 9, we learned that he too had been stricken with blindness when confronted by Jesus Christ. But, Paul recognized his error and followed Christ's instructions.

Elymas had a choice in this moment: change his mind about Christ and see the light spiritually, or continue to embrace the darkness. What does he do? Verse 11 says that instead of declaring his error and crying out to Jesus for help, he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. He embraced his blindness.

Another important thing to note is that God desires to give more light to those who seek after him. It was God who removed this barrier to the Gospel so that the curious governor would be given the truth. And, this leads to the third response that we can expect from man when we say "yes" to be a sent-one:

Mixed Responses from Man

a. Curiosity

- b. Callousness
- c. Conversion

Some will be curious. Some will be calloused. And some will convert in response to the gospel. Look at what happens to this “higher up” in the government.

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

I’m sure he was astonished after seeing his sorcerer go blind. But, he wasn’t saved because of his amazement at a miracle. He was saved because he was in awe of the teaching about the Lord, and believed.

As a result, he converted from darkness to light, from death to life, from blindness to sight. The results of conversion is something Paul would later write about in his letter to the Ephesians:

Ephesians 2:1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

Ephesians 2:3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

Ephesians 2:4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

I pray this story of God’s power to save and convert even amidst opposition will encourage you to put your “yes” on the table. I pray your desires will grow to match God’s desires to seek and save the lost.

I received a quote the other day from a family that many of you support as missionaries. These friends put their “yes” on the table and God called them to serve in Mauritania, Africa. The quote is from Charles Spurgeon who said:

"Think lightly of hell, and you will think lightly of the cross. Think little of the sufferings of lost souls, and you will soon think little of the Savior who delivers them." - Charles Spurgeon

Eternal life is at stake for a lost and dying world. And, we who have been given life by Jesus Christ, have been commissioned by him to go - if not to the world, then certainly to the lost in your world. Who is the Sergius Paulus in your life that needs to know of the eternal and abundant life found only in Jesus?

I pray that today you will begin to cultivate a heart attitude that says “Whenever you tell me to go...Whoever you want me to talk to...Wherever you lead...I am saying “yes” right now. Before I start trying to figure it all out, “Yes.” Even though I don’t know what that means for me, “Yes.” Even if I am fearful, “Yes.” Even if I feel like I don’t have enough knowledge right now, “Yes.”

Why can we say “Yes” with confidence? Because we can fully trust that the Holy Spirit goes before us, is with us, and will always be with us. We have his indwelling presence, the full support of his power, and his divine leadership to guide and provide for us. No opposition can come upon us that he can’t overcome in His name. And no one is too lost that he won’t save if they turn to him in faith.