

TWO PAULS AND A BLINDED SORCERER

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**A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.”
Acts 13:12.*

CYPRUS was by no means a reputable island, it was devoted to the goddess Venus, and you can imagine what her worship was, and what would be the fruitful licentiousness which sprang of it. It was the native country of Barnabas, and as he was at first the leader of the missionary party sent out by the church of Antioch, it was fit that Barnabas and Saul should begin preaching there. Landing at one end of the island the two apostolic men traversed it till they came to Paphos, where the Roman governor resided. Now, this Paphos was the central city of the worship of Venus, and was the scene of frequent profligate processions and abominable rites. We might call it “the place where Satan’s seat is.” Athanasius styled its religion “the deification of lust.” Neither men nor women could resort to the shrine of Venus without being defiled in mind and depraved in character. Yet it was no business of the apostles to stay away either from Cyprus or Paphos because they were the resorts of the gay and vicious, but rather there was a special need for them to go there with the purifying waters of the gospel. The more wicked the locality the more need for Christian effort in that very spot. Moreover, the Holy Spirit had sent the missionaries to Cyprus, and therefore they might safely enter the caverns of dark obscenity, and proclaim the word of salvation among the openly abandoned. Nor need they fear of success, for publicans and harlots have frequently been known to enter the kingdom before self-righteous Pharisees. Even the vilest of open sin is not so hard to deal with as a proud heart, which abhors the doctrine of the cross because of its humbling character. Let us not refuse to plow up any kind of soil, great harvests come from broken rocks.

Happily for the two servants of the Lord, God had prepared their way as He prepares the way of all His servants, for whenever He sends a sower forth to sow, albeit that a part of the land which he sows may be rock, or trodden path, yet there is always a portion which is plowed before the sower comes. God has a prepared people wherever He sends a minister to gather them in. He does not mock us by sending us on fruitless errands. If He bids Philip go down to the way which leads from Jerusalem to Gaza, which is desert, Philip does not find it a desert spiritually, for there he gathers one of the sweetest flowers that ever bloomed in the garden of the Lord. So now, when Barnabas and Saul come to Paphos it shall not be to break their hearts over the filthiness and obscenity of its idol worship, but to find for the Lord a jewel amid the mire. The chief magistrate of the island was a candid, studious, prudent man. He possessed an intelligent and inquisitive spirit, and was desirous to know all that could be known. Pliny mentioned him among the authors from whom he quoted. This man was anxious to discover the truth if it could be discovered, he had said *with* Pilate, but not *as* Pilate, “What is truth?” A certain Jew who was expert in the dark learning of the East, and practiced sorcery, had obtained considerable influence over this ruler, whose name was Sergius Paul. But instead of teaching him the truth, this false-hearted Jew imparted to him the mysteries of the Magi, and the superstitions of sorcery. Bar-jesus was this charlatan’s Jewish name, but he was false to it, for he was no son of Jesus, but one of a generation of vipers. Sergius Paul hearing that there were other Eastern teachers in the island, and being dissatisfied with the teaching of Elymas, sent for Barnabas and Saul to teach him the word of God. What a door of hope for this prudent man! What a splendid opening for the two preachers of Christ! Barnabas and Saul can go to

court and hold a meeting in the proconsul's palace, with one of the best of hearers as the center of their congregation, for a really prudent man is one of the most hopeful of listeners to the gospel if his prudence has not curdled into sophistry, and his knowledge has not fermented into self-conceit. It was a hopeful omen for the rest of the island that its proconsul was so free from prejudice that he called the two missionaries to his hall, and desired to hear from them the word of God. Barnabas and Saul accepted the invitation, and I think I see them both opening their commission in the deputy's presence. Good will surely come of such an opportunity, we are all looking for memorable results, but stop, we must postpone our hopes awhile, and look around upon facts.

I. Notice first, **OPPOSITION TO THE FAITH.** The missionaries were not to have it all their own way, Bar-jesus, who was also called Elymas, "withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith." As Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses when he commenced his mission, so this Jew Bar-jesus, opposed himself to the ministers of Christ. In some respects, *opposition to the gospel is to be much deplored.* Under some aspects the withstanding of the message of mercy is a very grievous thing. Should the glad tidings be denied? Should the doctrine which God has given by express revelation be held up to scorn? Woe unto the men who dare thus to provoke their God! Behold, you despisers, and wonder and perish! No man can set himself against God and against His Christ without frightful peril to his own soul. The greatest of men become base when they rebel against the light, "Be wise now therefore, O you kings, be instructed, you judges of the earth. Kiss the Son, lest He is angry, and you perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little." Rivers of water should run down our eyes because of the wicked who keep not God's law. Our hearts should be filled with horror at the blasphemy and presumption of those who set themselves with deliberate intent to oppose the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ, especially when they do it knowing something about it, and being half convinced of its truthfulness. The rejection of known truth is a crime which goes very near to the sin against the Holy Spirit, if it is not that sin. To oppose truth when it is seen to be truth, and to shut the eyes to light when it is admitted to be light, is a heinous offense against the God of truth, and He will certainly avenge it. Let us pity with all our hearts the men who oppose the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the more so, because we believe that in some instances they know better, and are violating conscience by their opposition. If half the noise that has been made in this country against certain infidels for wishing to exercise the rights of English citizens had been spent in prayer for their conversion, it would have been a more profitable use of zeal, and would have been far more likely to bring down a blessing upon the nation. We are too apt to ban and curse antagonists, instead of pitying and praying for them. It is not yours and mine to shut the door in any man's face, however depraved he may be, but still to stand and entreat him to come to the Savior, regarding even the judgments of God which fall upon him as meant to last only for a season, and intended to lead him to repentance, for this is the usual design of the chastening of this life. Why should not the chief of sinners yet become a believer? Sometimes those who were the most opposed to Christ have been the first to yield, and have become the bravest champions of the faith. Saul of Tarsus himself, who was opposed by Elymas, had been a furious enemy of that gospel which now he earnestly proclaimed, and this fact must have sustained his courage under the sorcerer's attack. Saul did it ignorantly in unbelief, but there is reason to fear that this Elymas willfully perverted the right ways of the Lord, and set himself deliberately with intentional malice to keep back an inquiring soul from the true faith. In such a case opposition to the faith is to be sadly deplored because of our pity for the enemy of the truth, who is in this thing an enemy to his own soul.

But I further notice that *opposition is eminently overruled for good*, and therefore it would be unbecoming in us to lament it or dread it. We may not think so much of opposition as to yield to it so far as to cease our testimony, or tone it down, or omit a portion of it. The apostle Paul, when speaking of a place where he hoped for great success, said a great and effectual door was opened to him, and there were many adversaries (1 Corinthians 16:9). It would seem that the second sentence was as good a sign of success as the first. Wherever there is likely to be great success, the open door and the opposing adversaries will both be found. If there are no adversaries, you may fear that there will be no success. A boy cannot get his kite up without wind or without a wind which drives *against* his kite. A contrary wind does much more for us than we suppose. Adversaries advertise the gospel, and so spread it. Opposing

work, although in itself, evil, is wondrously overruled by God for the best purposes, since persecution often awakens natural sympathy, and this becomes a ladder by which love climbs up into the heart. The devil is growing a little wiser than he used to be, but he still remains a fool, for if he looked back over his own history, he would see that he has been the means of spreading the gospel by the attacks which he has made upon it. A little stream of living water flowed through Jerusalem, and wherever it went it fertilized the earth, and caused it to bring forth and bud. It flowed on and became wider, and Satan said within himself, "If this continues I cannot tell what will come of it, I will therefore, stop its flow." He looked around and found a great stone nearby; I think it bore on it the name of Herod. This stone the arch-enemy dashed into the bed of the stream with intent to turn it aside. Great was the fall thereof, and in consequence of its force, the water of life splashed right and left, for they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word. Every drop of that little stream became the mother of another fountain where it fell, and so other lands were refreshed with the waters of life. "Divide and conquer," said Satan, he divided, but he did not conquer. His raging winds carry far afield the precious seed of divine truth, every tempest that he raises speeds onward the boat of the church. Now, see! Saul of Tarsus desires to preach and tell Sergius Paul about the eternal truth, and Elymas must interpose. "What good could that be?" cries one. "How can that be overruled?" It was overruled; the Lord made the wrath of man to praise Him, and brought to nothing the subtlety of Elymas.

In all probability the opposition of Bar-jesus may have called the attention of Sergius Paul more intently to the doctrine of the word of God. When a certain doctrine is neglected and half forgotten by the church of God, there rises up a bold heretic who rails at the truth most bitterly, and then Christian people remember it, defend it, and propagate it. A Colenso attacks the story of the Exodus, and all eyes are fixed upon Moses, and the tribes of Israel. Some critic or other attacks the book of Deuteronomy, and straightway we get a host of books about Deuteronomy, all the scholars of the Christian church begin to study it, and as a part of the word it is exceedingly valued. This Elymas finds fault with the gospel, and Saul and Barnabas are thus called upon to clear up the points at issue, and by refuting the magician's malicious errors, they make the truth the more apparent to the mind of the proconsul. So far so good.

But this man's opposition was overruled further, for when Saul looked at him and pronounced upon him the solemn judgment of God, namely that he should be blind and should not see the sun for a season, then the proconsul saw what power attended the word of the Lord, and how truly it came forth from the Almighty. God by that solemn judgment set His seal to the truth and let all men know that it could not be reviled without the most solemn hazard to the opposer. Blinded Elymas seeking someone to lead him by the hand was a visible witness for the truth against which he had fought. His sightless eyes were a just judgment from God. He had shut the eyes of his mind to the truth, and the Lord justly closed the eyes of his body. As he groped for the wall, he was against his will a most convincing witness to the truth of the gospel, and of the divine commission of Barnabas and Saul. Depend upon it, the Lord will yet baffle all opposers and He will establish His truth above all the traditions of men, His adversaries themselves being judges. Out of their own mouths He will condemn His enemies. He will so confound and confuse unbelieving philosophers that their blindness shall bear evidence to the light of His word, which blinds the proud and self-sufficient. Men will again see how "professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." Manifestly even before the eyes of the unlearned it has happened, and will happen again that learned skeptics will give vent to sheer folly, and become the victims of childish credulity till men shake them off and say—"They are not the wise men we thought they were, and the old-fashioned gospel which they set themselves to overthrow is better than their vaunted discoveries." So may it be right speedily.

Moreover, this Elymas by his overthrow made the victory of Christ to be the more conspicuous. Here are Barnabas and Saul, two poor Jews and they are met by one of their own countrymen, who has obtained the ear of a ruler, by acting the part of a courtier and a doctor. He knew how to play his cards with the proconsul. How can these two men hope to destroy his influence, and establish the cross of Christ in its stead? If you had looked at them you would have said Elymas was master of the situation. He had a fullness of subtlety and no conscience to embarrass his actions; he could use any cunning trick, while the missionaries could only keep to the truth. He seemed sure of defeating the two simple-minded

men, but as soon as Saul drew forth the sword of the Spirit, and told him plainly that though he might be called the son of Jesus he was the son of the devil, the victory was speedy and the vanquished sorcerer begged for help to make a retreat. Sergius Paul was one of the great ones of the earth, for those days comparable to a king, and when he believed, it was a noble gain to the cause. A chamberlain of the queen of Ethiopia had believed before him, but as not many great men, not many mighty are chosen, the conversion of the Proconsul of Cyprus was a great triumph for the gospel. It is noteworthy that from this point Saul of Tarsus is called Paul, and we read no more of Barnabas and Saul, but of Paul and Barnabas. If Saul had assumed the name of Paul from this memorable conversion, it would not have been an unworthy act, for his joy at the winning of Sergius Paul might fitly have expressed itself in a fashion suggested by a common custom among Romans. As Scipio after he conquered Africa was called Scipio Africanus, so this man Saul after such a glorious winning of Sergius Paul for Christ might himself become Paul. It is very singular, but from this moment we do not find him called Saul except when he is telling the story of his conversion and necessarily uses his old name. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles henceforth calls him Paul, and that name must often have cheered the suffering apostle. When he was persecuted he would remember his own namesake, the Roman Proconsul whom he had brought to the feet of Jesus, and Paul would see him standing in the front as a bright believer, while Elymas in the background utterly confounded, would serve as a dark figure to bring out the lights of the picture all the more clearly. Courage then, brothers and sisters, whenever you are trying to serve your Lord, if you are assailed, take heart and hope that a great victory is near. The Devil would let you alone if you were doing nothing of any consequence against his kingdom. If he could foresee your defeat, he has plenty to do, and therefore he would spend his strength elsewhere, but as he fears you he assails you. If you were a mere official he would let you go on with your rigmarole, but since he sees you to be a living servant of the Lord he raises up an Elymas, with smooth and slippery tongue, to speak against you. Be bold and faint not, for you shall find even the most crafty and cruel enemy to be the unwilling agent of bringing greater glory to God. Be not afraid of a man that shall die, or of the son of man which shall be made as grass. Go forward resting in the Lord, for greater is He, who is for you, than all they that are against you. With a brave heart defy all opposers, crying, "I will trust, and not be afraid." Never let us be discouraged, for the Lord is on our side. What can man do to us?

This opposition must have been to Paul very instructive, for it was symbolic of the future. It seemed hard to teach this man, this Hebrew of the Hebrews, of the tribe of Benjamin, as touching the law a Pharisee, that he was sent to preach to the Gentiles, for even when he went to Cyprus, he and Barnabas kept pretty much to Israel, preaching the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. But now he is to have an object lesson, which will show him his full career as in a living parable. Jew and Gentile are both before him. The Jew Elymas is opposing with the most bitter venom—true picture of his race. Sergius Paulus, the Gentile, listens with most prudent attention, candidly weighing everything, and at last he believes—thus has it been with many of the Gentiles. The chosen of God among the Gentiles accept that which the Jews refuse. When Elymas was struck with blindness what a sorrowful picture he was of that blindness which has fallen upon Israel! "Blindness in part," says Paul, "is happened to Israel," and so it happened to Elymas, "You shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a season." That word, "for a season," is a door of hope, for as the day came when Elymas could again behold the sun, so the day comes when the blindness shall be taken from the heart of Israel, and the seed of Jacob shall look on Him whom they have pierced. The scene before us is a picture of the whole history of the Christian church in its relation to Jew and Gentile. Let us, therefore, look forward with the expectation that wherever the gospel triumphs it will meet with opposition, and wherever it is opposed it will win the victory.

II. We have done with the opposition; now let us consider certain AIDS TO FAITH. Sergius Paul, "when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord." Kindly notice the words I have selected for a heading to this second part of my discourse—"aids to faith." I have not called miracles causes of faith, for they do not cause it, although they may lead up to it. What Sergius Paulus saw did not make him believe, but it helped him to believe. What did he see? He saw what was done.

First, *he saw the great courage of Paul*. In another case boldness struck a blow at unbelief, for when the rulers saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned, and ignorant men, they marveled. In this case the effect would be the same. That despised and persecuted Jew, Saul of Tarsus, fixed his eyes on Elymas as though he were perfectly master of the situation—as indeed he was—and without hesitation, or apology, addressed him, “O full of all subtlety and all mischief, you child of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?” What made Paul bear himself so bravely? What had given courage to this otherwise retiring individual to come into the front and speak like a hero, as he was? Brethren, I believe the courage of the minister is often made a great blessing to undecided and trembling spirits, therefore when you go to teach and preach, never exhibit doubt or fear. The man who himself doubts may beget doubters, but he cannot be the father of believers. If you have any question about what you have to say, go home and wait till you have solved the problem. “I believed, therefore have I spoken,” is the Psalmist’s statement, and it is a wise one. Unbelief in a pulpit is like the rebellious angels in heaven, the sooner it is cast out the better. Intense conviction on the mind of Paul led him to speak thus plainly, sternly, and even indignantly, and we are sure that he did not err in so doing, since his warmth was not the heat of his own spirit, but the fire of the Spirit of God, for we read that he was filled with the Holy Spirit. Let every teacher of Christ be thus filled, and then let him speak boldly as he ought to speak. Come not forward with your “ifs” and “buts,” and “perhapses,” to prove that which is its own proof, and bears its own evidence upon its brow. Tell out the message God has told you, as from Him, and not as your own opinion. Deliver sound doctrine because you have been delivered into it yourself, as metal is poured into a mold. Speak because you cannot be silent. Speak because the Holy Spirit has stirred you in your privacy to unutterable groanings and now moves you to speak out your soul before the sons of men.

It must have been an aid to Sergius Paul’s faith to have seen the dauntless outspokenness of the greater Paul, but when he saw Elymas blinded, that gave a further impulse to him. *When God works in judgments among the sons of men many are astonished, and inclined to hear what this word may be which bears so solemn a seal from the God of judgment*. O sirs, I would to God that some of you who have seen men die in their sins would be warned by what you have seen. To many of us it has happened that we have seen the drunk in his rags, perhaps in his delirium, possibly upon his deathbed. Some of us have seen the unchaste diseased in body, and despairing in soul, we have seen the profligate in poverty and dishonor, we have seen the sluggard hungry and homeless, and thus we have learned the result of sin upon other men if we have never felt it upon ourselves. He that will go to the hospital with his eyes open, or perhaps even call upon his next door neighbor when his sins have come home to him, may see what sin can do even upon the outward fabric of our manhood, what it can do upon the soul can be guessed from the ruin which it brings upon the body. The blinded Elymas is not before us today, but we know that the narrative is true, and therefore, without our actually seeing it, the lesson should come home to every thoughtful mind. We have probably seen with our own eyes instances in which other members of the human body have been rendered horrible with disease engendered by sin and that ought to create in us a horror of all evil, and incline us to hear what the remedy of sin may be. He that has once seen the bane will long to know the antidote. He that has smarted under the curse of sin will be anxious to learn the way by which the plague can be stopped, and men can be made anew in the image of God.

But if God’s judgments and wonders are aids to faith, *what shall I say of His wonders of mercy?* Blessed be His name, these are much more common, and can be much more easily seen. I cannot show you today a man blinded because he refused the gospel, but I can show you a great many whose eyes have been opened by receiving the gospel. They did not believe it, nor wished to know anything about it, but they were persuaded to come and hear the word preached, and while they listened there fell from the eyes of their understanding as it had been scales, and they began to see. The glorious light which gleams from Jesus’ brow was suddenly visible. The glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ came streaming into their once darkened minds, and they saw and believed. Hundreds of us who are now present were once as blind as bats to saving truth, but we have been brought out of darkness into marvelous light, and we gladly bear our testimony to the power of saving grace. I for one can say, “One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.” What I could not understand is now clear to me, what I could not re-

ceive has now stamped itself upon my very being, to my heart's intense joy. I know, brothers and sisters, that thousands of you could rise if I were to ask you to testify that the Lord has renewed you in the spirit of your minds, and has brought you into spiritual life, light, and liberty. Glory be to God for it!

It ought to be a great help to inquiring minds when they see numerous conversions all around them, for conversions are the standing miracles of the gospel, and if any man will only look into them, and consider them awhile he will perceive that they are the best attesting seals the truth can have. Evidently there is a singular power in the gospel which is not to be found anywhere else. What is this power? From where does it come? Could it go with a falsehood? We have seen the gospel produce a singular revolution in a man—not a reformation merely, but a far deeper change, a new birth, a complete reconstruction of his nature. How was this done? I knew a man who was of a fierce temper, a troubler to his own household when he happened to fall into his fits. He was so passionate at times that I should not like to tell all the wild things which he would do. I have seen that man since conversion, and he has had things to test him which might, as we say, have provoked a saint, but he bore them patiently, and in a manner which I desire to imitate. The lion has become a lamb, he is gentle and tender, no one could think that he was the same man; indeed, he is not, for grace has made him a new man in Christ Jesus. We have seen persons reveling in licentiousness, who sinned greedily, who could not be satisfied with any common sin, but they have heard the gospel, and become chaste and even delicate in purity, so that the very mention of their former crimes has shocked them and made them weep. Such persons have manifested a watchful care against the fault in which they once delighted. They have been afraid to go near their old haunts, or to mix with their old companions. What has worked this? What teaching must that be which accomplishes such marvels?

These changes have sometimes taken place in a brief space of time. Look at Colonel Gardiner, going to keep an appointment of the worst sort, and as he waited for half-an-hour because he found himself early, he saw or thought he saw a vision of our Lord upon the cross, and being reprov'd and melted by the sight, he fled from the spot, repented, believed, and lived a godly life. Until his death at the battle of Prestonpans, he was one of the leading Christians of his day. "That is an extraordinary instance," says one. I tell you I have met with scores equally remarkable. Not a week passes over my head but I hear of conversions which astound even me, as used as I am to these miracles of love. The most unlikely people, those whom their friends never accused of a touch of Methodism, who never spoke of religion without a sneer, have heard the doctrine of our Lord Jesus, and before long they have repented of sin, have believed in the Redeemer, and have come to the front among earnest Christians, working for the Lord Jesus Christ with all their might. Thousands of others, who have been quietly pursuing the paths of morality and outward religion, have, nevertheless, experienced a spiritual change which to them has been quite as memorable as if they had been turned from the grossest immorality to virtue. These Lydias are as truly converted as if they had been Magdalenes, and the change has been as real to them as if it had been conspicuous to all beholders.

What is this change? Is it fact or fancy? Do I see the skeptics smiling in a pretended pity for our folly? We are quite able to bear their contempt; will they be willing to hear a little reason? Sirs, do you think that we are all fools? In what are we inferior to those who thus despise us? Can we not manage our business affairs quite as well as those who think us fanatics? Are we all deceived? It is an odd thing that this deceit should lead hundreds of thousands in all ages to seek after virtue and true holiness, to seek peace, and live for the good of others. This singular phenomenon of regeneration is not to be denied, for its witnesses are countless. I claim that we have a right to be heard even by those gentlemen who believe only in actual phenomena. This is not to be put aside by a wave of the hand and a sneer; all attempts in that direction are as unphilosophical as they are insulting. We testify of certain operations which we have seen in others and felt in ourselves, by which the current of our thought is changed, our loves and hates have been made entirely different, and our whole manhood has been made anew. These operations we believe to be worked by the finger of God, and to be proofs that the gospel is supernatural and true. I do not say that this witness will lead any man to saving faith by itself, but I do say that were not men's minds depraved, it would do so. I say it ought, at any rate, to lead every man to give attention to that gospel whose operation is so remarkable. A skeptical barrister in America took it into his head to attend

a Wesleyan meeting, and he sat down apart from the rest merely to take notes of what was said, as he might have done in a court of law. He knew the persons who spoke one after the other, and bore testimony to the effect of the gospel upon them. They were his neighbors, and he thought to himself, "If I were arguing a case, and could put these people into the witness box, and they were on my side, I should feel quite sure of carrying my case, for they are well known for honesty and truthfulness." Several persons, without any collusion, rose one after another, and though their stories greatly varied, yet they all came to one point—that they had believed the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit had been made totally new. As the lawyer went out he said to himself, "Their case is proved. I cannot question the truthfulness of any of these witnesses. There must be much more in religion than I thought." This led him to seek the Savior for himself, and he became a Christian. I pray that many here present may feel that these wonders of mercy are a great aid to them, and may the Holy Spirit lead them to attend to the gospel which has such power in it! Here I wish we could stop and sing that admirable hymn—

*"Questions and doubts be heard no more,
Let Christ and joy be all our theme;
His Spirit seals His gospel sure
To every soul that trusts in Him.
'Tis God's inimitable hand
That molds and forms the heart anew;
Blasphemers can no more withstand,
But bow, and own Your doctrine true.
The guilty soul, that trusts Your blood,
Finds peace and pardon at the cross;
The sinful soul, averse from God,
Believes and loves his Maker's laws.
Learning and wit may cease their strife,
When miracles with glory shine;
The voice that calls the dead to life
Must be almighty and divine."*

III. But I must proceed. Lastly, let us observe THE SOURCE OF FAITH. "Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord." *It is doctrine, then, or faithful teaching, which brings men to Christ.* Let those who despise doctrine mind what they are doing, for the doctrine of the cross is only foolishness to them who perish. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, the plain teaching of the word of the Lord leads men to believe in Jesus. I do not think it is any great good for a preacher to stand up and cry, "Believe, believe, believe," if he never tells you what is to be believed. There is plenty of this kind of preaching about, and the result is sadly transient and superficial. Poor souls say, "We are ready to believe, but tell us what to believe; we are ready to trust, but tell us what to trust in." If we do not preach the great doctrine of the atoning sacrifice, if we do not lift up Christ as suffering chastisement in man's place and stead, we have not put before them the basis on which their faith is to be built. Justification by faith and regeneration by the Spirit must be taught continually. The proconsul was no doubt astonished to see Elymas blinded, but he was a great deal more astonished at the doctrine which Paul preached when he began to tell him that salvation was not by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ, that the way to be accepted of God was not by presenting to the Lord anything performed by us or felt within us, but by laying hold upon the righteousness which Jesus Christ has worked out and brought in. When he heard this good news, he might well be astonished, and yield his heart to Jesus. Dear friends, the most astonishing thing in the world is the gospel. "We have heard it for a long time," says one. Have you? You may have listened to it for years, but all the while it may have gone in and out of your ears, and still you may have never *heard* it. But if you have heard it inwardly, and understood it, you will acknowledge that it is the miracle of miracles, the masterpiece of divine wisdom. Listen! In the gospel God is just and yet merciful. He lays upon His Son the chastisement of our peace, and then He forgives us freely for His own name's sake. In the gospel everything is of grace, there is no respect to human merit or human virtue, but God gives freely to undeserv-

ing sinners, and yet there is nothing like the gospel for fostering holiness and making men zealous for good works. It will not allow good works to be the root of spiritual life, but it promotes, no, creates good works as the fruit of that life. All the really good works in the world are fashioned upon the anvil of free grace. Nothing ever produces holiness but faith in the Holy Savior and it is as wonderful as it is true, that while the gospel bids the sinner come to Jesus as freely as if he were not guilty, yet it declares that without holiness no man can see the Lord. It does not merely command holiness, but it produces it. It is a wonderful system for clearing the guilty, and yet for condemning his sin. It is the glory of the gospel that it can at one blow save the sinner and slay his sin, absolve the rebel and end his rebellion. This supernatural effect is not produced for a short time only, but forever. The gospel does not renew a sinner for a season, and then leave him to relapse, but it gives an endless life, implants a deathless principle, and secures ultimate perfection. It is written, “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.” “He that believes in the Son has everlasting life”—not a life that comes and goes, but a life that endures to all eternity. All this can be done in a minute, so that a heavenly life commences in less time than it takes the clock to tick—is not this an astonishing work of the Holy Spirit? As Sergius Paul heard of this he was amazed, and believed; do you wonder?

I say to you who do not understand the gospel, if you need a refreshing sensation, if you go in for novelty, and desire something off the common, begin to study the word of God, and to hear it without prejudice. Here is a doctrine which is always news, always glad tidings. Hear and your soul shall live. Turn from it and you will perish. Angels have not yet grown weary of gazing into the depths of the gospel. It is written, “Which things the angels desire to look into.” Two figures of cherubim were placed over the mercy seat of old, standing with outstretched wings, and gazing down upon the lid of the Ark of the Covenant, which was called the mercy seat. This was meant to set forth the desire of holy angels to comprehend the gospel of propitiation. They cannot get a full understanding of all its mysteries till you and I shall join them before the throne, and there declare what grace has done for us, “to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.”

Come then, my hearers, come and candidly study what is to be believed. Come and be astonished at the doctrine of Christ crucified! Incline your ears, awaken your minds, and yield your hearts, be eager to be instructed of the Holy Spirit, who waits to teach you. If you are willing and obedient you shall eat the good of the land. If you desire to know God you shall know Him. The great Father is not far from any one of you. There is the light! It is not dim, nor far away. The fault is in your eyes if you do not see. Oh, that you would cry out with Bartimaeus, “Son of David, have mercy on me.” Oh, that your prayer would be, “Lord, that I might receive my sight.” Then you would see and believe, and live forever. God grant it this very morning, to the praise of the glory of His grace. Amen.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ACTS 13:1-43.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—122, 484, 486.**

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