

Sermon Summary | Sunday 5th July 2026 | Acts 13.1–12

Acts 13.1–12 marks a major turning point in the book of Acts. The gospel has already spread from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and beyond, but now the church in Antioch deliberately sends Barnabas and Saul into the wider Gentile world. As they go, Luke shows us that Christian mission is not a human invention or a desperate institutional strategy. It begins with God. The Holy Spirit sends, the church obeys, and the word of God is proclaimed.

The passage begins with a worshipping church. The leaders in Antioch are ministering to the Lord and fasting when the Holy Spirit says, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Mission begins not with panic, cleverness, or activism, but with worship, prayer, listening, and dependence. The church is not trying to recruit God into its own plans; it is being drawn into his. That is deeply reassuring. The gospel does not rest on our confidence, creativity, or ability to explain everything perfectly. It is God’s message, God’s mission, and God’s power. Our calling is to receive it, love it, speak it, and live in line with it.

But as the gospel goes out, it meets resistance. In Cyprus, Barnabas and Saul encounter Sergius Paulus, an intelligent Roman official who wants to hear the word of God. They also meet Elymas, a magician and false prophet who tries to turn him away from the faith. Acts 13 reminds us that the gospel does not merely meet busyness, awkwardness, scepticism, or indifference. It also meets opposition. Not every question is hostile, and not every objection is malicious; many people carry honest doubts, wounds, or confusion. Yet we must not be naïve. There are voices, fears, habits, desires, and spiritual powers that do not want people to come to Christ.

That should not make Christians harsh or fearful. Opposition does not mean the gospel is failing. In Acts, opposition often comes because the word is advancing. The gospel is resisted because it is true: it announces that Jesus Christ is Lord, that he died for sins, rose from the dead, offers forgiveness, and calls people from darkness to light. For those exploring faith, this means resistance may not be a sign to turn back. If coming towards Christ feels harder than expected, it may be because the truth is drawing near.

Paul then confronts Elymas with severe words, because he is making crooked the straight paths of the Lord. The Lord has made a clear and gracious path to himself through Jesus Christ: forgiveness, repentance, faith, and new life. But that path can be obscured when grace becomes vague niceness, repentance is removed, Jesus is reduced to a moral example, sin is hidden, or Christ’s welcome is blurred. Paul’s warning is serious because distorted teaching harms people.

Yet even here there is mercy. Elymas is struck blind “for a time,” and Paul himself knew what it was to be spiritually blind until Christ opened his eyes. The difference between Paul and Elymas is not that Paul was naturally better, but that Jesus had shown him grace. We all need more than information, advice, or religious routine. We need Christ to open our eyes.

The passage ends with Sergius Paulus believing, astonished at the teaching of the Lord. That is where Luke wants our attention to rest. The centre of Christian mission is not spectacle, pressure, manipulation, or personality. It is the teaching of the Lord. Through his word, Jesus opens blind eyes, brings people to faith, and leads them from darkness into light.

Questions for personal reflection

1. Where am I tempted to lose confidence in the gospel because of resistance, awkwardness, or fear?
2. What voices, habits, fears, or desires might be trying to turn me — or someone I love — away from listening seriously to the Lord Jesus?