

Life Group Discussion Guide

Against All Odds: How the Name of Jesus Spreads
Week 6: Into Enemy Territory • Acts 13:4-12

Many Christians today find themselves amazed at the state of our culture.

"Look at what children are being taught in our schools."

"I can't say anything about Jesus, but my co-workers can display their pride symbols everywhere."

"What dark times we're living in."

But as he unpacked this week's passage of Scripture, Pastor Jon challenged us with a different perspective.

*"We should not expect a Christian-ish culture friendly to the gospel—a culture that will easily respond to the gospel. Because, if we're reading our Bibles correctly, we know that the mission of Christ calls us always to carry the Name of Jesus into enemy territory. And you don't go into enemy territory expecting applause, agreement, and smiles. You go in with fear and trembling. You go in with prayer and fasting. You go in, not amazed at the lack of faith, but amazed at the power of God. Amazed that **Jesus disarms the powers of darkness.**"*

- In what ways have you seen (or participated in) a posture of amazement toward the power of darkness in our culture?
- How does this attitude inhibit the Church from living out its God-given purpose in our day?
- How does the above quote from Pastor Jon's message challenge that way of thinking?
- What changes in our lives and our churches when we shift our focus toward Jesus' power to disarm the darkness?

As we equip ourselves to carry the Name of Jesus into enemy territory, this week's passage reveals four things our mission will require:

1. Being on the move with the Word of God

Acts 13:4 tells us that Paul and Barnabas, "sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus." This reveals our first sign of a life on mission: being on the move.

"Christians should always be moving toward someone, being sent toward someone. The Holy Spirit does this. If you're not moving toward someone for the purpose of pouring into them, loving them, serving them, teaching them Christ, giving them hope, being a friend, you may want to ask yourself, 'Is the Spirit of God in me?' Or, 'Am I listening to the Spirit?'"

- Who are you "on the move" toward?

- If you aren't moving toward anyone right now, pray together for direction from God's Spirit and the obedience to follow His leading.
- How can you support one another as you live "on the move" together?

As we continue this week's passage, we see Paul and Barnabas weren't sent empty-handed. They brought something absolutely imperative to their mission: the Word of God. As Pastor Jon put it,

"If we're going to make the darkness quake, we need to be on the move, sent by the Spirit of God, with the Word of God."

- What keeps us from speaking the truth of God's Word in our culture today?
- Why is God's Word mission-critical for carrying the Name of Jesus into enemy territory?
- What would it look like for you to carry God's Word "on the move" with you into your workplace, neighborhood, family, etc.?

2. Threading the needle on who the enemy is

A few weeks ago, we read about the Roman ruler who put James to death and arrested Peter. After learning of Herod's horrendous actions, wouldn't it be easy to lump all people in power together and say, *"These people are against us"*? But there's just one problem.

This week, we meet Sergius Paulus. He's also a ruler on behalf of Rome, and yet, he's not an enemy of the faith. He wants to hear about the Lord and, when he does, he believes. This sheds light on a dangerous human tendency:

*"We love lumping people together. We approach mission far too focused on differences in ideology and beliefs between **us** and **them**. I see Christians picking fights with all kinds of groups. What are you doing? What matters most fundamentally is that we're all people loved by God, people for whom God has a message. Paul and Barnabas knew this. They had a message, and the proconsul was ready to receive it. This is why we need to thread the needle carefully."*

- In what ways have you seen (or participated in) this tendency to lump groups of people together as the "enemy"?
- How does this week's Scripture passage challenge that mindset?
- What changes when we begin to see each person as someone loved by God and for whom He has a message?

3. Entrusting judgment to God

While Sergius Paulus did not reject the faith, our passage tells of someone else who did. Elymas was a powerful sorcerer who "opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith" (v. 8). Watch what happens next:

“Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, ‘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? 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.” (v. 9–11)

Paul looks beyond Elymas’ powerful acts to the one really pulling the strings—calling the sorcerer “a child of the devil.” This reveals a spiritual reality to which Western society tends to turn a blind eye. Pastor Jon put it this way:

“Over the last 200 years we’ve been taught that the universe is governed by certain laws of physics and that all that exists is matter and the human mind. Scripture certainly teaches, however, that there is not only a God, but other supernatural beings, both good and evil. These supernatural forces of evil are real, and they’re the true enemy of God, of God’s people, and of the peoples of the earth.”

When we go into enemy territory, we shouldn’t think first in terms of people, flesh, and blood. Instead, we think in terms of the spiritual forces of evil that hate God and the world.

- Have you viewed a person or people group as the enemy of our faith, as opposed to recognizing the spiritual forces at play?
- When we recognize spiritual powers of darkness as the true enemy we’re up against, how does that change the way we approach our mission?
- According to this passage of Scripture, who has the power over these dark spiritual forces? How does that change the way you’ll live on mission?

4. Living in amazement at the teaching about the Lord

The last thing we read in this week’s passage is that Sergius Paulus, seeing the power of the Lord, believed and was amazed at the teaching about Him (see v. 12). Reflecting on this, Pastor Jon left us with a question:

*“What claims **your** amazement? The darkness of our culture or the power of our Christ?”*

Jesus Himself came into enemy-occupied territory and faced immense opposition, up to and including His death. But this was no surprise to Him, and it’s not where the story ends. It was through His sacrificial death that Jesus won the ultimate victory against evil for us. And it’s because of His resurrection that we can advance into enemy territory with an unshakable confidence in the One who disarms the powers of darkness.

- Pray together now to see the spiritual battle of our day as Christ sees it—a war already won. Pray for the boldness to advance into enemy territory equipped with the Word and Spirit of God!