Macaroni and cheese is my daughter Addy’s favorite food. Whenever we have macaroni and cheese for a meal, she can’t wait to eat dinner. But she’s very methodical about how she eats her meal on those nights. She always wants the macaroni and cheese to be the last thing she eats, so she sets it apart from the rest of her food, eats everything else on her plate, at least what mom and dad make her eat, and then she gets to the really special part, the part of the meal she set apart to save for last. When she finally gets to the macaroni and cheese, you can see the joy on her face. Suddenly my little girl who eats like a bird the rest of the time is asking for second and third helpings.

If you are a football fan, you know that there is a special player on a professional football team. The kicker is a specialized player. They don’t go out for every play, and they don’t get involved in the brawl of every play where they might possibly get injured. That’s because they are set apart for a special job. They are set apart for the time when they need to kick the ball. That one job is so important that the coaches won’t risk the kicker being injured to send them out to do anything else.

In Acts 13, we see two men, Saul and Barnabas, who are set apart as well. But the reason they were set apart was far more important than a football game, or even macaroni and cheese.

**Acts 13:1–3 ESV — 1** Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. **2** 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.” **3** Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

Luke tells us that these men were prophets and teachers. When we hear the word prophet, we often think first of someone who foretold the future, but that’s not all prophecy is. Prophecy is proclaiming the word of God. Prophets who told of future events were simply proclaiming what God had revealed to them about what was going to happen, and we do see some of that in the New Testament. We’ll see a prophet named Agabus later on in Acts who foretold that Paul was going to be arrested.

But a prophet could just as easily be someone who simply proclaimed the word of God that was already written down in Scripture. That’s a part of what Rod, and I, and our elders, and often those of you who lead us in communion do when we preach and teach God’s word. So these men might have been those who foretold the future based on what God revealed to them, we don’t know for sure. But what we do know is that this was a group of men who were immersed in Scripture. These men taught and proclaimed God’s word, and helped others to understand what it meant. Saul and Barnabas were a part of this group as well.

These men were all together, worshiping God and fasting together, and suddenly the Holy Spirit moved among them. I have no idea whether these men heard an audible voice as the Spirit spoke, or if they just all felt the nudging of the Holy Spirit at the same time. But somehow the Holy Spirit made it his leading clear to this group of men, and he wanted Paul and Barnabas set apart for His work.

These prophets and teachers didn’t miss a beat. The Holy Spirit told them to move, so they did. They prayed and fasted some more, then they laid hands on Saul and Barnabas, which was the way they gave authority to someone, and then they sent them out.

**Acts 13:4–8 ESV — 4** So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. **5** When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them. **6** 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. **7** He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. **8** But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.

Saul and Barnabas immediately went out and followed what the Holy Spirit led them to do. There was no question, no objection. Last week we saw how Mary submitted to God’s plan for her life, this is another example of the same kind of submission to God. These men did exactly what God asked of them without a hint of objection.

Is that how we handle prodding from the Holy Spirit, or do we make excuses why we can’t or won’t? When we feel like the Holy Spirit is urging us to help someone, do we make some excuse and pass them by? If we feel like the Holy Spirit is urging us to do some kind of ministry in the church, or to volunteer our time somewhere, do we make excuses for why we’re too busy to do that right now, maybe some time in the future?

If we make excuses when we feel like the Holy Spirit is urging us forward to do something, then we are not faithfully following after him the way that Saul and Barnabas did.

You know what those excuses are like? When Mae doesn’t want to go to bed, she’ll come out of her room right after we’ve put her to bed, and she’ll say, “Mom, Dad, I need to tell you something.” So we humor her, and ask her what she needs to tell us. She’ll stand there looking around the room going, “Umm…umm…umm…” What she’s doing is trying to figure out what she can say that will keep her out of bed the longest. She doesn’t want to do what we’ve asked her to do, so she tries to come up with an excuse on the spot. Sometimes it can be cute, but when it happens at 3am, it’s suddenly not so cute anymore.

If we want to be people who truly follow Jesus, and faithfully follow where the Spirit leads, then we have to get rid of the excuses that we use to put off doing what he calls us to. If we are going to faithfully follow after God, then we have to follow where the Holy Spirit leads us with no objections, and no excuses. When we do that, we are going to face opposition, just like Saul and Barnabas did here in Acts 13.

Elymas was a magician. We read about Simon the magician back in Acts 8 who tried to buy the Holy Spirit. These men were performers. They were amazing people with their magic, captivating audiences by what they could do. The problem is, these magicians were not just tricksters, they weren’t performing sleight of hand.

There are only two sources of power in our world. One is God, and the other is Satan. Anything that has real, spiritual power that does not come from God comes from Satan. Magic is real, something every Disney movie tries to get us to believe. But it’s not the kind of magic you see in kids shows. This kind of magic is dark, and it’s evil. That’s what Elymas and Simon were practicing. They were messing with spiritual powers they probably didn’t even understand. But now, Elymas had come face to face with men full of the Holy Spirit, who knew exactly who and what he was.

**Acts 13:9–11 ESV — 9** But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him **10** 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? **11** 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.

What Paul said here might seem harsh. Imagine if this was how we spoke to those who opposed the church? Things probably wouldn’t end very well, right? But remember, Paul and Barnabas were being led by the Holy Spirit here. Paul didn’t say these things out of spite, or hatred, or anything else. He said these things because that’s what the Holy Spirit led him to say.

Look at what happened **Acts 13:12 ESV — 12** Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

Because Paul followed the leading of the Holy Spirit, this proconsul, Sergius Paulus, believed in the Gospel of Jesus. Paul dealt with the opposition of Elymas, and this man of intelligence saw how real all of this was.

I think that Luke mentions that Sergius Paulus was a man of intelligence for two reasons. First, it shows that believing in Jesus is not just some emotional event that you get caught up in, and suddenly you’re a part of this group that doesn’t make sense to intelligent people. No, the Gospel of Jesus is a rational, logical thing, something that makes sense when you really think about it, something that even the smartest people you know can believe, because it’s the truth.

Secondly, remember who Luke was writing to. It was a long time ago when we talked about it, but Luke was writing to a man named Theophilus. Theophilus was probably a Gentile, and from what we know of him, it seems like he held some position of authority or power. Luke mentioning the intelligence of Sergius Paulus could possibly be his attempt to connect with Theophilus, probably also an intelligent, high ranking Gentile man.

A lot of people in our world assume that if you are a person of intelligence, you won’t need to believe in God. There was a kid in my High School that always told me that religion was the crutch of the weak. He’s not the only one in our world that thinks that way.

Sergius Paulus proves them wrong. He was a man of intelligence, and he believed what Paul and Barnabas told him because he saw what happened to Elymas with his own eyes. This man was a proconsul, which means he was the governor of the province of Cyprus. This was a man with authority who came to believe that the Gospel of Jesus was true. Imagine how much impact a governor being a Christian would have had on the people he led, the kind of leader he would be, and the people around him who would see the changes happening in his life.

What would have happened if Paul had resisted the urging of the Holy Spirit to say those things to Elymas? What if he had been too concerned about being too rude, or offending someone to say what needed to be said?

Let’s make it a little more personal. Does the Holy Spirit ever prompt you to be more bold than you are in the way you speak to people? Do you ever stifle the leading of the Holy Spirit because you don’t want to be rude, because you don’t want to offend people, or because you don’t want to make things awkward? What if God put a Sergius Paulus in your path, and you chose to stay silent, so they never heard about the Gospel? What opportunities have we missed because we were too busy worrying about how things would come across instead of following the leading of the Holy Spirit?

Luke also sneaks this other little bit in here: he says, Saul, who was also called Paul. A lot of people assume that Saul went through some big change where God changed his name, like when Abram became Abraham, or Jacob became Israel. You’ll have a hard time finding that in Scripture, because it never happened.

Paul grew up in a Hellenistic culture, a Greek culture, but he also grew up in a Jewish family. Because of that, Paul was known by two names, a Hebrew name, and a Greek name.

The name Saul is a Hebrew name, so when Saul was around his fellow Jews, he was called Saul. When he was in a Gentile culture, he was called Paul, and that’s what we’ll see him called throughout the rest of the book of Acts. This serves as a kind of transition in the book of Acts, where the focus shifts from the church in Jerusalem, to the missionary work that Paul and his colleagues do among the Gentiles.

What we see throughout Paul’s ministry is that he did whatever he needed to do to make himself relatable to those he was called to take the Gospel to. Paul gives us his strategy for missions in **1 Corinthians 9:22–23 ESV —22** … I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. **23** I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. And that included being known by his Greek name when he was among Gentile people.

After their success in Paphos, Paul and Barnabas left to take the Gospel to new places and new people. **Acts 13:13–15 ESV — 13** Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem, **14** but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. **15** After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it.”

Now this is a different Antioch than we’re probably used to hearing about, this is not the place that Barnabas witnessed a congregation full of the Holy Spirit as Rod taught about a few weeks ago. This was Antioch in Pisidia, a city that had never heard the Gospel before.

John, who had been sent along with Paul and Barnabas to assist them, which I always read as, ‘supervise the new guys’, obviously thought his work was done, so he left to go home. That’s when Paul carried out a strategy that he used in nearly every new city he visited.

Paul and Barnabas went to the local synagogue. They gathered in worship with their fellow Jews, and at a certain point during their worship, they were offered an opportunity to speak. Paul jumped at that opportunity, and laid out the Gospel message for all those who were thee that day.

That was Paul’s MO. Whenever he entered a new city, the people that he went to first with the Gospel message were his fellow Jews, gathered in the synagogues for worship. Paul had already done some of this right after he was converted in Damascus. He had gone into the synagogues there and proved through his teaching that the Old Testament Scriptures all pointed the way to Jesus.

Sometimes that strategy worked out beautifully and the Jewish people in that town believed in Jesus, and then he went out to reach the Gentile people of the city. Sometimes it made him an enemy of the Jewish people of the city, and he went to the Gentile people anyway. More than once, Jewish people from the cities he had visited tried to kill Paul, and a group of Jews even followed Paul around for a while, just to stir up trouble for him.

But Paul never wavered from his mission. He never backed down, and he never stopped going to the synagogues first. Paul was sent to reach the Gentiles for Jesus, but his still loved his fellow Jews, and he always gave them an opportunity to hear the Gospel as well.

When Paul was given an opportunity to speak, he very simply told them the Gospel story. This wasn’t some deep theological lecture, or something that people would need a seminary degree to understand. He just told them who Jesus was, and what he had done. Many times when we see Paul share the Gospel with people, all he does is tell his own story of what Jesus did in his own life.

Talking about Jesus to other people doesn’t have to be a difficult thing, and it’s not something that requires that you have a lot of training. It just requires that you be bold enough to tell other people about what Jesus has done for you, and what he can do for them too.

Paul finished his presentation of the Gospel with these words: **Acts 13:38–39 ESV — 38** Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, **39** and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.

This time when Paul spoke to the Jews in the Synagogue in Antioch, they listened to him, and they were hungry to hear more.

**Acts 13:42–43 ESV — 42** As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. **43** And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.

We have a message to take to the world that many times we assume people don’t want to hear. We think no one wants to hear us talk about Jesus, no one wants to be told what they need to do. That might be true of some people, but there are people out there today, just like these people in Antioch, that are hungry for the hope the Gospel of Jesus brings. They are desperate for something that makes their lives worthwhile, something they can live for. When people like that hear the story of Jesus and what he has done for them, you can bet you’ll see people who are hungry for more.

Don’t ever think that it’s not worth it to tell people about Jesus, because you don’t think they want to hear it, or you think everyone is against you. You will probably find people like that at times, but more often than not, you’ll find people who need hope, people who need a Savior, and people who are glad to hear about the one who can offer both of those things.

Look at what happened because Paul was bold enough to speak up about the Gospel:

**Acts 13:44–45 ESV — 44** The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. **45** But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him.

Almost the entire city of Antioch gathered to hear Paul speak about the Gospel that day. Not just the Jews, not just the ones who had been in the Synagogue the week before, almost an entire city of people. We don’t know how many people were living in that city, but we do know that most of them would have been Gentiles.

Because Paul was suddenly reaching out to Gentiles, the Jews, and here the Greek is probably talking about the leaders of the Jews in Antioch, were jealous. That word for jealous is the same word that Luke used when he spoke of the High Priest being jealous of the Apostles back in Acts 5. It’s a word that means to have intense negative feelings about someone else’s accomplishments or success. They were filled with that kind of jealousy in the same way the Apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit. Suddenly they weren’t so keen on Paul and his message, and they began to openly oppose him.

**Acts 13:46–48 ESV — 46** And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. **47** For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, “ ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’ ” **48** And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

Because of the jealousy of the Jews, the Gentiles had an opportunity to hear the saving message of the Gospel, and they rejoiced when they heard that the message of salvation was for them too. The Gentile people had no doubt heard for years about how the Jewish people were God’s chosen people, and according to them, there was no hope for anyone else.

Now they finally heard a message of hope. They finally heard that Jesus had opened the door for the Salvation of all people, and they were overjoyed. Many of those Gentiles in Antioch became believers, and the Gospel was spread throughout the whole region.

Paul and Barnabas were run off by the Jews in Antioch shortly after, but they made a lasting impact on the people in that region. We know that because in Acts 14, they make their way back to that same city, and appoint elders to lead the group of believers that was now growing in that region because they were bold enough to speak to them about Jesus.

God had a mission in mind for Paul and Barnabas. He set them aside for the work he had to do for them, and they went and did it, and people all over the world came to know Jesus because they followed the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Just like God had a mission for Paul and Barnabas, he has a mission in mind for you as well. And just like Paul and Barnabas, if we are serious about following after Jesus, we need to seek out his will for our lives. If you have not found your calling from God, if you don’t know what God created you to do, the mission he has for you, then seek it out. The Holy Spirit spoke to Paul and Barnabas when they were worshiping, fasting, and praying. I don’t think that was a coincidence. Find out what the HS is leading you to, and then go do it.

God has a mission for you. He created you to play a part in building up his Kingdom and reaching others with the Gospel of Jesus. If we are faithful enough to seek out God’s will for our lives, if we are bold enough to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, then God can do incredible things in our lives, in our church, in our community, and in our world. If only we will trust and follow him.