

## Cling to the Spirit

Pastor Justin

~ Acts 13:1-16

January 18, 2026

### Introduction:

Good Morning!

- What a wonderful meeting we had on Tuesday!
- I counted 117 at one point
- Gerald shared a wonderful devotional on the same passage we are looking at today!
  - He taught how God is the one who raises up Pastors and sends them.
  - The Holy Spirit speaks to and through believers
  - The church collectively just listens and responds to the Spirit
- After the discussion and questions, we had the united vote in affirmation.
- Talk about the Holy Spirit being crystal clear!
- As a church it was clear -We are excited to do ministry together with Hugh & Bev!
- And at the same time, it was noted that change is hard,
- while it's exciting to have something new on the horizon for SVBC, we must be willing to set aside our desire for comfort, control, and routine, to let the Spirit lead us into 'the next steps'.

The unity we saw at the congregational meeting was no small thing. Because too often in our lives we are fine with the Holy Spirit leading, as long as he runs it by me first – because we like being comfortable

### ME:

- **Comfort hides behind good intentions**
- We can make resistance to what God might be doing, sounds spiritual:

- We don't think it's wise, or it's too simple-not flushed out enough, or too complex.  
Or not traditional, or we tried that already and so on...
- Comfort shapes our schedules, prayers, relationships
- We rarely call it control, but that's what it is

**WE:**

- We often are led by what feels safe, not by the Spirit.
- Comfort keeps us settled, and fear keeps us silent
- Jesus said to the pharisees, "*You nullify the Word of God for the sake of your tradition*"
- And we all struggle with how we balance our comfort and control with the risks we take.
- In Act 13, as we continue our journey with the early church, we learn that as disciples of Jesus we get to **trust the Holy Spirit to lead us where our comfort won't**.

*Comfort is nice, and it feels safe and good. But when its time to move, we cling onto the Spirit, not our comfort.*

**GOD:**

**ACTS Chapter 13:1-14**

<sup>1</sup> 13 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.

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. 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. 12 Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

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." 16 So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said: "Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen.

After this, Paul shares with them the history of Israel, and how Jesus is the fulfillment of the scriptures. People are so enamoured that almost the whole city turns up to hear more. But the leaders are threatened and they drive out Paul & Barnabas, at which point they resolve to preach to the gentiles instead of the Jews.

Through this narrative, we see a handful of ways that the Spirit leads where comfort wont.

- **First we see how the Spirit is leading in this church.**

They are:

- worshipping
- Fasting
- Praying
- Listening >together!

The Holy Spirit speaks here → Notice the wording in verse 2 “the Holy Spirit said...”

Just a theological side note that it's passages like this that reference the Holy Spirit as a being, a person, not an object or an 'it'. This is part of why and how the church has articulated the doctrine of the trinity.

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We also see that the Holy Spirit is speaking here in community. Yes he speaks to individuals, but also in community.

Mission is often discerned by a listening church when they are together.

This past Tuesday was exactly this!

- The Holy Spirit spoke. The church listened. Then we sent the calling out to Hugh & Bev.
- Praise God!!

- Next we notice that when the Spirit speaks, **he doesn't tell the church to stay comfortable.** He says: “Set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”
  - Of course out of comfort Zone for Paul & Barnabas...

- This was Paul's first "mission assignment" after 10 years back in Tarsus (home)
  - Prayerfully remember Hugh & Bev in this position rn!
- They are being called to release their best leaders!
- Obedience costs them something
- Their comfort is disrupted
- It creates an unknown future
  - This is where we pray for Broken-down Church!
  - & for us as we welcome a new Sr Pastor, that is new for us, and that change is uncomfortable, and like was said on Tuesday night, we get to embrace that, clinging to the Spirit, rather than our own comfort. That's exciting!
- We also see that **God works without our permission**
  - As soon as the mission begins, then resistance shows up:
    - Elymas resists the gospel
    - Religious leaders grow jealous
    - Control is threatened
  - Elymas is an interesting character. His name is the "The Magician" in Arabic or Aramaic, or "the wise man", and we are given the information, that he is using his ability to deceive and manipulate, or even more likely, his occult practices, to try and control others and is a false prophet. He's not just like David Blane doing cards tricks. Given the information we have, he's likely tied to demonic occult practices, which is likely why God takes such a strong action against him.
    - He is severely against the disciples and opposing them, and God isn't having any of that.

- And look what it says about the response – he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord. He saw what happened, but it's not the blinding that convinced him – it was the Gospel.
- Then look at the leaders later on in the chapter.
  - Paul is invited to speak in the synagogue & he does.
  - He stops with a cliff hanger of sorts
- “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. 40 Beware, therefore, lest what is said in the Prophets should come about:

41 “Look, you scoffers,  
be astounded and perish;  
for I am doing a work in your days,  
a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you.”

42 As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath.

- Then it says that the next week that almost the whole city gathered to hear them share the word! Historians estimate this city would have been around 10-20 thousand people
- It says that the Jews got jealous of the crowd.
- Why? Because their control and influence was being threatened.

- Story: Weird thing about churches comparing #'s  
but people are threatened by another church taking control or influence in the area. – Which is a weird thing to even think about.
- But here in this city, Paul & Barnabas are preaching the word, and the Jews are jealous.
  - The problem isn't that the gospel is unclear. The problem is that God is working outside their control.
  - **Resistance often reveals where comfort is still in charge**
- The Spirit welcomes unexpected outsiders
  - The Gentiles don't casually show interest. They beg to hear the word of the Lord again.
  - When they realize the gospel includes them, they don't hesitate, they rejoice.
  - The very people the insiders (the Jews) overlooked, become the ones who respond with faith.
  - Here's the tension Luke wants us to feel:
  - Insiders grow jealous
  - Outsiders grow joyful
  - Why? Because the Spirit is leading grace beyond the boundaries of comfort.
  - This moment answers a question many people are afraid to ask out loud: "Do I really belong here?"
  - Acts 13 answers clearly:
  - Yes. Not because you fit the culture. Not because you earned a place.

But because the Spirit leads grace to everyone.

- While our comfort asks, “Are they like us?” the Spirit asks, “Are they ready to hear the Gospel?”
- And finally, **Joy thrives when we cling to the Spirit**
  - The chapter ends with a contrast:
  - As opposition increases, joy increases

50 But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. 51 But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium.

52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”

- Faithfulness doesn’t remove difficulty, but it produces joy.
- This is what Spirit-led mission looks like in the real world:
- Not safe. Not controlled. But deeply alive
- Comfort fades when things get hard.
- Joy grows when the Spirit is near.

## YOU:

- So this chapter in Acts reminds us as disciples, to be asking: are we clinging to the Spirit or to comfort?
- Comfort isn’t always obvious. It doesn’t shout. It sounds reasonable.
- When the Spirit speaks, comfort can’t stay in control.
- For some of us personally, that means trusting God in a season of change, or fear, or loss. Letting go of fear. Saying yes where we’ve been hesitant.

## GOSPEL:

- Some here may be hesitant in taking the first steps of putting their faith in Jesus.
- In fact, without faith, you have been choosing comfort over God. We've all been there > Going our own way. The Bible calls that sin> and it separates us from God.
- But God didn't leave us in our sin. He sent Jesus. Jesus took on flesh and came to earth to live a perfect life that we couldn't live and die the death we deserved.
- On the cross, Jesus took our sin. Three days later, He rose from the dead, defeating sin and death forever.
- And now He offers us a choice: Will we cling to the comfort of control, or surrender to Him?
- Following Jesus means letting go. It means trusting Him more than your plans, your safety, your reputation.
- The Spirit leads where comfort won't. And today, He's calling you to follow.
- If you've never surrendered your life to Jesus, today is your day. Don't wait for comfort to give you permission.
- Pray : "Jesus, I've been holding onto control. But today I let go. I believe You died for my sin and rose again. I surrender my life to You. Lead me where comfort won't."

## WE:

- This week, we saw Acts 13 lived out among us.
- We listened together.
- We prayed.
- We discerned.
- And by God's grace, we moved forward in unity.

- That unanimous vote wasn't just agreement. It was a testimony that we are choosing to trust the Spirit over our comfort.
- So as we move into this next season together:
- We won't cling to what's familiar.
- We won't be led by fear.
- We will hold fast to the Spirit.
- **Because the Spirit leads us where comfort won't > and joy follows.**

Let's pray.

Father,

Thank You for Your Spirit who speaks and leads. Thank You for the unity You've given our church. Help us continue to trust You as we move forward. When change feels uncomfortable, give us peace. When the future feels uncertain, give us faith.

Keep us listening, humble and keep us clinging to You.

Both as a church, and as individuals, lead us where comfort never could, and fill us with joy as we follow.

in Jesus' name,

Amen.

**Benediction**