Acts 13:1-12 (NIV)

1In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. 2While 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." 3So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. 4The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. 5When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper. 6They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, 7who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. 8But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. 9Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, 10"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? 11Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable 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. 12When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

INTRODUCTION: (Read text, if it was not the Scripture reading)

–This text records the church’s 1st commissioning of missionaries, the 1st missionary journey, and the 1st conversion in the Apostle Paul’s missionary career. It’s also here that Saul starts being called Paul.

–Title, because this passage has 3 stories of enlightenment in the lives of the 3 prominent individuals. In each case, we see that HOM.idea.

I. The Blindness of Saul

A. Saul’s custom was to preach to Jews, so— v.5. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues.

B. Later, he wrote about this in describing the saving power of the Gospel in Rom 1:16, “first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”

1. Many Jews had migrated there (lots of synagogues to preach in!)

2. Christian Jews there did as Saul did— Acts 11:19. Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews.

C. But God wants to expand our limited vision, even as Christ said in John 4:35. Do you not say, “Four months more and then the harvest”? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.

1. Saul was so blindly focused on the Gospel harvest “for the Jew” that he didn’t see that there was a Gospel harvest “for the Gentile.”

2. The evidence was there [Ethiopian eunuch; Cornelius & household], but his focus blinded him to the larger Gentile harvest field. (Sticking only with what we’re used to keeps us from seeing and participating in realities beyond the limits of our experience.)

D. Any true ministry we have really comes from God— v.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.”

1. God gave Saul a new job description (and eventually he clearly recognized it— Gal 2:8, “my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles.”)

2. So clear was God’s call, that, from this date onward, he set aside his Jewish name, using only the Gentile name Paul, like that of the Roman proconsul he led to Christ, Sergius Paulus.
III. The Blindness of Sergius Paulus

A. His was a common, seemingly innocent but dangerous blindness:
   1. He might have thought to himself, “I’m of noble birth and of a noble nation. Why seek gods other than my own?”
   2. Blind faith in whatever beliefs you inherit is a dangerous way to face eternity. (Paul reminded Gentile converts in Eph 2:11-13, “you who are Gentiles by birth...remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, ...without hope and without God in the world.”)

B. But, as “an intelligent man,” his logic might have told him: “With so many views of truth, only the one from God must be right.” (After all, he took a Jewish prophet as his counselor, and it says he, “sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God.”)

C. The spiritual blindness of those who seek truth is easily cured, but how ironic that his cure was facilitated by watching God make a false prophet go physically blind—v.12, “When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.”

CONCLUSION:
—Jesus preached the truth to heal spiritual blindness, and they crucified Him. But He rose again and went back to work. He said He would send the Holy Spirit to keep on revealing truth—John 16:8. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment. The Holy Spirit reveals divine truth, regardless of our response to it.
—Do we have any blindness like that in these 3 men? Are we like Saul, so focused on our experiences that we miss seeing important realities beyond them? Do we ever blindly sacrifice our convictions, as Elymas did, to gain clout or prestige? Or conversely, like Sergius Paulus, do we recognize our lack of knowledge and want it corrected by the Word of God? If we are willing to have our spiritual eyes opened, the Holy Spirit will show us aspects of truth that we might have missed, aspects of God’s will that we’ve been blind to, the internal presence of Christ in us that we may not be feeling.