

**THE
BON AIR
PULPIT**

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Sermon: *God-Touched Lives*

Judie and I are very grateful to be back with you today after our African trip. Our members are aware that about a year and a half ago our daughter was appointed as a Missionary in Mozambique in Southern Africa and about that time I had observed the tenth anniversary of being your pastor and you gave me the money and the time to go to visit our family. So we have been there for a good while and visiting with them. We now understand better what we have read in e-mails and now will have more appreciation for what we have seen and witnessed and smelled and been involved in. So we are very grateful to have the opportunity to have gone and you are very gracious to allow us this privilege and we are grateful that God provided us safety and health and enabled us to be back with you. After we had been in Southern Africa for about a month, we were joined by a team from our congregation and we had the privilege of leading all of the missionaries and their families in Tanzania in their annual mission retreat. With all of their families, Tanzania is a large mission, about 140 people there for the mission meeting, and so I am grateful that I am pastor of a group that could go and provide the kind of leadership for that kind of meeting. We will take the opportunity, surely, in the next weeks and months to share with you more about this experience. We want to be good stewards of it. It has certainly already broadened our perspective about life. I am reminded however of the church that was without a pastor and they put out a survey and asked what do you want

and what do you don't want. They said, they knew what they didn't want. They didn't want any pastor that had ever been elected to an office. They did not want any pastor who ever knew any Greek and Hebrew, and they did not want a pastor who had been to the Holy Land. And it may be you don't want a pastor who has been to Africa for 6 weeks. So I'll try not to bore you with experiences but I am grateful again for the opportunity to be there. Now, I would like for you, if you would this morning, to turn in your Bible to Acts, Chapter 13. You are already aware that the Book of Acts is the only book of history in the New Testament. It tells about the first 25 years of the movement of Christianity. And really, as you know, what happened was there was a great God-sized explosion that took place in Jerusalem and what the Book of Acts tells us is how that explosion - the effects of it - began to ripple out throughout the world. And as it began to ripple, it touched the lives of people and it is amazing to me that as you read through the book there are biographies of people's lives who were changed. They were, I call them God-touched lives. And in the next few weeks I want to talk with you about some of these God-touched lives. We can understand how God worked in their life and maybe we can understand a little better how God can work in our life. So let me begin reading in Verse 1 of Chapter 13. In the Church at Antioch there were prophets, teachers. Then they began to listen to them. It is almost like a roll-call of heroes. There was Barnabas, there was Simeon called Niger. This is the man that most Bible scholars think is the Simeon that helped carry the cross of Jesus. He was there. There was Lucius of Cyrene, there was Manaen that was brought up with Harod the Tetrarch, and there was Saul. And while they were worshipping the Lord and fasting the Holy Spirit said, set apart from me Barnabas and Saul for the work I have called for them. So after they had fasted and prayed they placed their hands on them and sent them off. Now begins the journey. The two of them sent on their

way by the Holy Spirit went down to Seleucia and sailed there over to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis they proclaimed the Word of the Lord in the Jewish Synagogue. John was with them as their helper. They traveled throughout the whole island until they came to Paphos. That's the capital. And there they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus who was an attendant of the Governor whose name was Sergius Paulus. The pro-consul was an intelligent man. Let me pause just a moment - intelligent not just in the sense he was smart - intelligent in the sense he was open-minded, searching for truth, willing to hear new ideas. He sent for Barnabus and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of the Lord. But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the pro-consul from the faith. Then Saul, who was also called 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, 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. When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord. Through the years, Christianity, Christians, have reached out to people who have fallen down or who have been kept down by society. We've reached out to people who are sick. We have tried to help people who are poor. We have tried to help people who need special care. And part of being a Christian through the years has always been to reach out to those individuals that we call the down and outers. But it is also true that one of the weaknesses of Christians has been that we have forgotten the up and outers. We have forgotten those individuals who seem to have everything and because they are usually more powerful than us,

richer than us, we feel like there is not much we can offer to them. This passage of Scripture is about one of the up and outers. It is about a man who is the governor of the whole island. And yet he was a man who came and gave his life to Christ and had his life changed because he had given his life to Jesus Christ. Now you need to understand why he came. He came because he was made just like all of us. When God made us he made us to have a relationship with Him. As you know, he made us really in three different parts. He made us with a body and with our body we have contact with the world. He made us with a soul and that's our mental life, that's how we have contact with each other. But God also made us with a spirit. And with a spirit we have the privilege and the opportunity of having contact with Him. We are the only things that God made that have the opportunity to really have fellowship with God to be able to talk to Him and to hear Him talk to us. It's been amazing that when we recognize that of all of the genes of a chimpanzee, and the genes of a human, they are 97 percent similar. But in those three percent the difference that has happened is that we are the ones who are able to have contact with God and to have a relationship with Him. Now you have learned as I have a little bit about psycho-somatic medicine. You have learned that if you are sick in the body it will affect your emotions. If you are emotionally ill, sometimes it will affect your body. But what if you are spiritually ill? What if you are at the place where nothing is working right in your spiritual life? Then you begin to understand that everything may be going all right physically and everything may be going all right emotionally but there is still something in your life that is lacking. There is something there that is not right and it's not incidental but it is essential to your life. You

just know something is wrong on the inside. Most of you have gone fishing in your life and you have taken a fish out of the water and as you put it in the boat the fish will flop for a while and then it die. And the reason it dies is because it suffocated. God made it to live in the ocean. When you pull it out it can't live in that atmosphere. We were made to live in God. When you take us away from Him then something inside of our life begins to flip and flop and we begin to suffocate and we begin to realize something is wrong and Sergius-Paulus who lived in one of the best houses on the island could write his name on a piece of paper and laws were passed. He could blow his bugle and armies would come rushing. He sat there and said something was missing in his life. And it may be in your life. You may be considered one of the up and outers. You may have a strong body. You may be very educated and strong emotionally. But you have come to understand that something is missing in your life and that's a relationship with God. And the wonderful story in the 13th chapter of Acts is here was one of the up and outers. Here's the man who thought he had everything. He suddenly realized he had nothing. That what he really needed in his life was what these people were telling him. And the Bible says that he was intelligent, he was open, he sought new truth. And I wanted to tell you this morning that there are some Sergius-Paulus in our audience. There are people who are yearning but who are open, who want to know, who are willing to search new truth and I want to tell you what God will do for you in your life. First thing that he will do is that he will work miracles in other people's lives so that they can help you in a relationship with Christ. The passage of scripture started over here in Antioch. Put in your mind a picture of the Mediterranean. In the middle of it is Cyprus. And way over here in Syria is Antioch. Well,

before they ever got over here God was doing the work over here. God was working in these people's lives, saying to them, *I want you to go to Cyprus*. Now you have got to understand. They had never heard of anything like that. Nobody was a missionary. Nobody every thought about leaving home and going somewhere to tell other people about Christ. And if they went they certainly wouldn't talk to a Roman. I mean, a Roman was - they were in charge of everything. They would never have thought about doing that. And the Bible says, God worked in their life until they got to the point to where they were willing to go and to be open to teach. But before they got there. God had been doing a miracle in their life. Now, I have found that if people have already kind of walked down the path of openness and walked down the path of obedience and walked down the path of a vision, that it is not quite so hard to get them to take the next step. It is hard for God to break through when you and I say, *I am just going to stay right here and I am not going to be interested in anything out there. I'm not going to open my mind to new ideas, not going to look at new people, not going to - I'm just going to live this way*. Well, it's pretty hard for God to break through that. I remember moving to an area on one occasion and I met a family and they said they had been coming to the church but not too active. So I went to one of the very active members and I said, "Do you know so-and-so?" They said, "Well, I know them by name but I don't really know them." And I said, "They have been coming to church for a while and they really need somebody to bring them in and touch them and I wish you'd get a chance to know them and they said, "Well I'm sorry we just don't know them. You see, they live across the river." And I began to think. Across the river. What river are they talking about? And then I realized that about ¾ of a mile from the church was a river. And they were from beyond the river. And they didn't know them. So I asked them, the people who lived across the river, I said, "How long have

you been coming to the church?" And they said, "Eleven years." But they had that little sign over them. They were from across the river. Now you have been there too. It's kind of hard to ever say go 500 miles from home if they haven't accepted people from across the river yet. But these people had already accepted. They had already become cosmopolitan. They had already been open and when God said we want you to go, they were ready to go. And God led these people to go, to have the opportunity to share the message of Christ. And I want to tell you. God, if you are open, God will work in other people's lives to make sure that they will get the message to you. Let me tell you about a man I met a couple of weeks ago. His name is Gale Sadler. Gale Sadler was a farmer in West Texas. He said, "I lived so far in West Texas I could see Arizona. Spent all of my life on the farm. Daddy owned the farm." He had two sons. He was 45 years old. Got up every morning and did the farmer thing. Went down to his little country church, came back home He was a farmer, gonna be a farmer. When his Daddy died he was going to inherit the farm. He was going to be... He went down to the little country church. He heard somebody talk about going outside of Texas to tell people about Christ. He walked out of the church. He turned to his 45 year old wife who had never been, she said, more than 100 miles away. He said, "You know, we could be missionaries. And she said, "You've been working too hard. We could be missionaries?" He said, "Yes, we ought to pray about that and think about that." So they prayed about it and thought about it. After a while they decided that they could be missionaries. He went and told his Daddy. He said, "Daddy, I have been living on the farm all my life. But I am going to have to leave the farm. I don't know where God is leading but God wants me to be a missionary." His Daddy looked at him and said, "Son, where are you going that you can't find in Texas?" And he said, "Daddy, I don't know where I am going." His wife was a high school graduate - 45 years of age.

She went back to college. She said, "I can't do this" and he said, "I'll go back with you." He started going to classes with her. The Professor finally looked around one day and said, "You ought not to be in these classes. You have a college degree. Tell you what you do. Why don't you enroll in the MBA program?" He said, "Why would I want to be in the MBA program? He said, "I think you ought to be." They filled out a little form. First question was, why should you be in the MBA program? This was his answer - "I don't have the foggiest notion." She graduated from college. He got an MBA. God felt a call. They went all the way to Tanzania. He said they went out visiting one night. As they visited they helped a person to come to faith in Jesus Christ and the man turned to him and said, "I am so glad that you came and told me about Him. And he said," Yyou don't understand what God had to do to get me to you." But I want to tell you something. If you are open. If you are interested, God will turn the world upside down to make sure you get the message. The second thing God will do - God will overcome every barrier that stands in the way. When Sergius Paulus wanted to hear the message he had his own private prophet. The private prophet wanted to stand in the way because he was getting ready to lose his job. Paul looked at him and said, "You are going to get out of the way, in the name of Jesus Christ I am going to claim Sergius Paulus." And what God is saying in that little story is this. If you are open to him and you begin to look at all the barriers that are between you and God, God will leap-frog over all of them to help you to come to him. Every person who ever gets ready to give their life to Christ or every person who gets ready to walk closer to Christ always tells me this. You know, every time I get close I feel a pull back. Every time I want

to take a step forward, there seems to be somebody in the way. I would like to make a commitment but, Pastor, what's wrong? I just can't seem to make a commitment. Well, you are not unusual. Everybody has a barrier there because the devil knows that if you keep walking he is going to lose part of his kingdom. He's going to lose you and God will work in your life to make sure that if you are interested, there's never a barrier too great that he can't overcome. You may think it's a barrier of a relationship. You may think it is a barrier of a habit. You may think it is a barrier of a friend. You may think it's a barrier of a job, but I want to tell you that if you are open, God will go over the barrier and help you to come to faith in Him. I want to tell you why he ultimately came. He ultimately came because he said he was amazed at Jesus. Amazed at Jesus. You know, when you take a trip just like I have come back from - this is the African story - you become more amazed about Jesus. You are aware that people all over the world adore Him. All over the world people honor him. Before I went, my daughter e-mailed me of all the times I would be speaking while I was there and she said, "Dad, one of the men in our church was thrown in the jail and we have been visiting and we have permission for you to come on a regular basis while we're there and for you to speak." So the day came for me to go down to jail and as we walked down my daughter turned to me and said, "Are you prepared for this?" Then I knew I wasn't. So we approached the jail and the jail was a concrete fence, had some little lean-to's against it where the men lived. No doors. No sanitary facilities. The only way you got food was if somebody would bring it in to you. You were all thrown together. Nowhere to get out of the sun except over in this little lean-to and that's where you were. It was the most gosh-awful place I have ever been in my life. And so the group I went with started

singing and I began to realize out of these little lean-tos about 75 men walked out. Hardly any of them over 35 years of age. And they told that they were going to sing a little while, and that the fellow with the white face was going to speak. I want to tell you what I told them. I told them I was a Christian minister. I told them that my job was to tell people about Jesus Christ. That Jesus Christ had lived 2000 years ago but that since that time people all around the world had given their heart and their life to Him. That there were now twice as many people who honor Jesus Christ as their God and their Savior more than any other religion put together. Then I began to tell them about Him. I told them about prophecy. That there were over 300 prophets of prophecies in the Old Testament that said that somebody was going to come and Jesus came and fulfilled them all. I told them that Jesus was not a good man or reached up to God but that He was a great God who reached down to man. That he was a God who came in the form of Jesus Christ. I told them a little about what he said. I told them a little bit about what He did. I told them that he died on a cross and I said three days later God raised him up and now he is seated at the right hand of the Father on high and it took me about 30 minutes with an interpreter to tell them the story of Jesus. I turned to them and I said, "I know nobody has ever done this to you before but I wanted to ask you if you would bow your heads." Here we are. I mean, boy, it's hot and we are out in the midst of all this. And I said, "I want to ask you to bow your heads and what I told you about Jesus I want to know if you would like to know more about him and you would like to maybe consider giving your life to Him." They all started doing this. After while I said, "If you would like to do that I would like to know it." Seventeen fellows raised their hand. And after it was over, I said, "All right, here is what we're going to do." We handed out little booklets that told them about Jesus. And I told them, "Now you have got to take this booklet and you have to read it." I didn't know if they could

read it or not. Forty five percent of the people in that area cannot even read the first word.. So I handed them all out and I said, "Next week I am going to come back and pick up the books." I came back the next week. We all got together. I said, "Do you have your books?" All 17 had filled it out. All 17 - I graded them - all 17 passed. One of them slipped up behind me. He was putting on a shirt. "I didn't get one of those books, he said. So I asked them to bow their heads. "All of you all who didn't get a book last week and want another book, raise your hand." Twenty one men raised their hands. So I started handing out books again. I took up those books and I gave them Part 2. A fellow came up behind me. He said, "You got a Bible? I said, "Yes, I've got a Bible. You got any money?" Missionaries encourage them to pay for it, not just give it to them but to pay a little bit for it. Now, you understand, that Mozambique is the poorest country in the world. The average person makes \$5 a week. He pulled in his pocket. He had been holding that money for a rainy day. And he gave me the equivalent of an American dollar. And I gave him a Bible. When I gave him one and they realized what I was doing, two other fellows came up. They pulled out a dollar and they said they wanted to buy a Bible. And I turned to the fellow through an interpreter and I said, "Why do you want the Bible?" And he said, "Because it tells us about Jesus." The world is still amazed at Jesus. We are amazed and that is the reason we are here. People in that gosh-awful place that I visited are amazed Those young boys were amazed when I told them about Jesus. Let me buy a book that I can learn more about Him. And I want to tell you that if you are open, if you would listen, if you would search, you would find a Christ that said, *if I am lifted up where people would understand me I will draw all kinds of people to me.* And it doesn't make any difference where you've come from or what your need is, I want to tell you that once you learn about Jesus Christ you too will be amazed at who He is. So amazed that you will want to give

him your heart and your life and say, Lord here I am, I want to live like you want me to live and I want you to forgive me and I want you to help me. I don't know what God has been doing in your life. I only know this. He has been doing something. I come every Sunday with a sense of assurance that God has been working in your life. This morning when we got through with the first service three young men came down and said, "God has been working in my life. Here is my decision." I don't know what God has been doing in your life but I know he has been working and if you are open He'll work in people's lives to help you to understand. You will overcome barriers and He will amaze you with His presence. I hope today that you will be willing to say, I want to give my life to Christ. I hope you will be willing to say, we're Christians and we want to get involved in this church. You might want to say something else in your life that God has been leading you to do. But we want to ask you, openly, publicly, to respond to what God has done and you make the decision you need to make.